United Nations S/PV.8316

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8316th meeting

Tuesday, 24 July 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Skoog/ Mr. Orrenius Skau	(Sweden)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
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	France	Mr. Delattre
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	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: Before each participant is a list of speakers who have requested to participate in accordance with rules 37 and 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, as well as the previous practice of the Council in this regard. We propose that they be invited to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining us via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: As we meet today, tensions between Syria and Israel continue to rise, and last Saturday we were minutes away from another devastating confrontation between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. It has taken an intensive effort at preventive diplomacy by the United Nations and Egypt to make sure that both sides in the Gaza conflict step back from the brink of the fourth military confrontation in Gaza over the past decade.

In September 2014, shortly after the conflict, my predecessor delivered the following remarks to the Council:

> "[w]e must change fundamentally the dynamics in Gaza. If we do not, Gaza could implode or, yet again, explode — possibly with a new and even more devastating round of violence." (*S/PV.7266, p. 3*)

For four long years, that fragile ceasefire has been taken for granted. For four years, the United Nations has urged concerted action to address the root causes of this man-made catastrophe — the intractable conflict, more than 50 years of occupation and more than a decade of Hamas control of the Gaza Strip, Palestinian division and a crippling Israeli closure regime. And for four long years, the underlying dynamics have not improved. The humanitarian crisis has deepened, the political stalemate between Hamas and Fatah has worsened, and the prospect of another deadly round of violence is growing by the day. Only through the repeated, collective efforts of all sides has another catastrophic escalation been averted over the past weeks.

On 15 July and earlier today, I travelled to Gaza in an urgent effort to de-escalate tensions. I appealed to Palestinian factions not to provoke incidents at the fence, to immediately stop the firing of rockets and mortars, and to stop the incendiary kites and balloons. And I appealed to Israel to reopen the crossings, stop shelling, particularly in populated areas, and to exercise restraint towards Gaza. Over the past two weeks, however, the situation quickly spiralled out of control, nearly to the point of no return. Today, I reiterate my call on all in Gaza to step back from the brink. Those who seek to provoke Israelis and Palestinians to war must not succeed.

The past month has witnessed one of the largest escalations since the 2014 conflict. Nineteen Palestinians, including seven children, were killed by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in Gaza during protests, clashes, and air strikes, and more than 1,000 were injured. One IDF soldier was killed by gunfire from Gaza, while four Israeli civilians and an IDF soldier were moderately injured. In the occupied West Bank, a Palestinian teenager was killed by the IDF during a search and arrest operation, while some 25 Palestinians and three Israeli soldiers were injured in various incidents.

Hamas and other militants fired 283 rockets and mortars from Gaza towards Israel. The Israeli Air Force fired some 189 missiles and artillery shells against targets in Gaza, including two tunnels between Gaza and Israel. Meanwhile, Egyptian security forces also destroyed a tunnel between Gaza and the Sinai. Over a 24-hour period from 14 to 15 July alone, militants fired some 220 rockets and mortars from Gaza. One rocket directly hit a house and injured four people. Other rockets landed in the grounds of a synagogue and near a children's playground in Sderot. The IDF fired 90 missiles and artillery shells towards what it said were military sites, injuring at least 25 Palestinians and killing two teenagers in the highly populated centre of Gaza City.

On 19 July, an Israeli drone shot towards a group launching incendiary balloons, killing a Hamas militant. The next day, an IDF soldier was killed by sniper fire from Gaza, the first such fatality since 2014. Israel retaliated against dozens of military targets across the Strip, killing three militants claimed by the military wing of Hamas. In response, Palestinians in Gaza launched three rockets towards Israel, without injury or damage. In the early hours of 21 July, a spokesperson for Hamas announced that Hamas had agreed to restore calm. That was followed by Israeli authorities later that morning informing Israeli civilians living near the Gaza border to return to their normal routine.

Incendiary kites and balloons continued to be launched from the Gaza Strip towards Israel, triggering over 1,000 fires in surrounding communities, although since the evening of 20 July, that number has decreased significantly. Over 8,500 acres of land have been burned, including fields, forests and agricultural land since the launching of incendiary kites began.

In other violence related to the continuing protests at the Gaza fence, on 13 July a 15-year-old Palestinian was shot and killed by the IDF while climbing the Gaza perimeter fence, and an IDF soldier was injured by a hand grenade thrown by a Palestinian protestor. A 20-year-old Palestinian also later succumbed to injuries incurred at the fence on that day. On 6 July, a Palestinian was killed, reportedly due to the detonation of an explosive device he was carrying. On 2 July, four Palestinians breached the fence into Israel and reportedly attempted to set fire to an abandoned military post. The IDF shot and killed one, and injured at least one other.

In reaction to the continuing launching of incendiary kites and balloons from Gaza, on 10 July Israel closed the Kerem Shalom crossing, allowing only humanitarian supplies, food, fuel, medicines, animal fodder and livestock, and reduced the fishing zone for the Gaza Strip from nine to six nautical miles. As tension continued to escalate, on 17 July the entry of fuel and gas through the crossing was also halted, and the fishing zone was further reduced to three nautical miles.

After intense efforts by the United Nations and Egypt, I can now report that the situation is calming down, although tensions remain. I returned to Jerusalem from Gaza just an hour ago and am hopeful that, through the collective efforts of all sides, we can avoid another confrontation, allow Palestinians in Gaza and Israelis in communities across the border to sleep in peace and begin addressing all humanitarian issues. Today, the first 100,000 litres of much-needed fuel were allowed through the Kerem Shalom crossing to be distributed by the United Nations, prioritizing hospitals and emergency services.

The recent sharp escalation in violence and heightened tensions in Gaza must not divert us from our broader efforts to address the crisis. I continue my engagement with Israeli and Palestinian counterparts, as well as with regional and international partners, to reduce tensions, to address humanitarian challenges in Gaza and, critically, to support the Egyptian-led intra-Palestinian reconciliation process.

Advancing urgent infrastructure projects to improve the water, electricity and health systems, and to create employment that would have a quick impact on the ground remains a key element of de-escalation. So is improving access and movement for the people of Gaza through Israel and Egypt. To that end, the United Nations is enhancing its presence on the ground to work with donors and international partners to facilitate the smooth implementation of such projects, in full coordination with the Palestinian Authority and regional and international stakeholders.

Those efforts are already gaining momentum. On 17 July, the United Nations Development Programme announced the implementation of various economic initiatives that will create more than 2,500 immediate and short-term job opportunities in Gaza, particularly benefitting youth and women, over a 12-month period. But let me reiterate what I said on 15 July. There is no point in asking donors to continue funding initiatives without a political horizon for the future. This cannot be another futile exercise in conflict management and recurring humanitarian support.

Our work is focused on restoring unity between Gaza and the West Bank under one democratic Government and one legal system where all weapons are under the control of one legitimate national authority. To achieve that, we must avoid an escalation, alleviate the suffering of people, and work to lift movement and access restrictions in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

To move these efforts forward, I have engaged with the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and all stakeholders. Last week, Norway convened a meeting of the United Nations, the European Union,

the World Bank and the PA to discuss coordination mechanisms to fast-track interventions aimed at bolstering the water, electricity and health networks, as well as temporary job creation on the ground. Yesterday, the Palestinian Prime Minister's Office convened donors to reinforce these priorities ahead of the discussions of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, scheduled for September.

These developments are taking place while the financial crisis of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains a very serious concern. UNRWA has communicated to staff that every effort will be made to mitigate the impact on the most vulnerable refugees of reductions in emergency assistance. Of particular concern is the possibility of a delay to the start of the school year for some 526,000 students in UNRWA schools throughout its areas of operation. At present, UNRWA needs some $217 million to sustain its work for this year. I urge the swift mobilization of support to enable the continuity of assistance and the maintenance of stability on the ground in the region.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli authorities have continued the demolition and confiscation of Palestinian-owned structures. In Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu, located on the outskirts of Jerusalem and populated by some 200 people, Israeli authorities requisitioned land, levelled access routes to the community and declared the area a closed military zone. These actions were taken in advance of the planned demolition and displacement of the entire community. The relocation site offered by the Israeli authorities — Jabal West — has been rejected by the community itself. The fate of these Bedouins will be decided by the Israeli High Court no later than 15 August. On 5 July, in Abu Nuwar, the authorities demolished 19 structures.

Both Khan Al-Ahmar and Abu Nuwar are among the 18 communities located in or adjacent to the controversial E-1 area, where plans for new settlement construction would create a continuous built-up area between the Ma'ale Adumim settlement and East Jerusalem, undermining the contiguity of a future Palestinian State. The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, along with the European Union, Norway, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, the League of Arab States and others, have condemned these measures. I reiterate the call on Government of Israel to cease demolitions and other measures that run contrary to its obligations under international law.

On 12 and 17 June, in compliance with Israeli Supreme Court rulings against settlement construction on privately-owned Palestinian land, the authorities demolished 28 structures in the two illegal Israeli outposts of Netiv Ha'avot and Tapuach West. The United Nations believes that settlement construction remains illegal under international law, and I take this opportunity to once again call on the authorities to cease such actions.

On 2 July, the Knesset passed a new law requiring the withholding of a portion of clearance revenues that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority and transfers to Ramallah, in line with its commitments under the Paris Protocol. Funds withheld would be equal to the amount paid by Palestinian authorities to prisoners and detainees convicted or accused of security offenses against Israelis, to their families, as well as to families of Palestinians killed or injured in attacks against Israelis. The implementation of the law is expected to have a significant negative impact on the Palestinian Authority's fiscal sustainability. I reiterate the Secretary-General's call on all parties to refrain from unilateral actions and respect their obligations under previous agreements, United Nations resolutions and international law.

Turning to Syria, recent developments on the Golan have heightened tensions. On 6 July, the IDF fired across the ceasefire line towards a location from which it said a shell had been launched that landed in the area of separation. On the same day, Syrian authorities informed the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) that the IDF had fired tank rounds across the ceasefire line at targets in the area of separation. Following the Syrian Government's offensive to recapture the south, which began on 19 June, an agreement was reached on 11 July between the non-State armed groups in Dara'a and the Syrian Government with Russian mediation to bring the entire Dara'a governorate under the control of the Syrian Government. By 20 July, the Government was taking control of several areas in Quneitra province, particularly near the ceasefire line.

As at 19 July, UNDOF had observed approximately 2,205 tents set up for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in its area of operation. As of 23 July, the number of tents observed by UNDOF in its area of operation

had decreased to 765. As of 20 July, almost to 203,000 Syrians remained internally displaced across south-western Syria. Close to 70 per cent of the displaced population are located in the western part of Quneitra governate. While the Government of Israel has made it clear that no IDPs would be permitted to enter into its territory, in the past month alone Israeli authorities have reported delivering over 100 tons of food, 370 tents and supplies of fuel, medicine and clothing, and provided medical assistance to injured Syrian civilians.

The living conditions of the IDPs are dire, and the United Nations currently has no cross-border or cross-line access to Quneitra. Gaining unimpeded humanitarian access to provide assistance and protection to all affected populations is critical.

On 11 July, Israel informed the United Nations that it had intercepted an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) that had been launched from Syria into Israel and that Israel would not tolerate breaches of the 1974 Separation of Forces Agreement. That same day, UNDOF reported that three rockets had landed in locations in the area of separation. Subsequently, UNDOF observed three missiles explode in the same area. The IDF announced that it had targeted three military posts in Syria in response to the infiltration of the Syrian UAV earlier in the day. On 13 July, Israel said it had fired a missile at another UAV that had approached from Syria. Following each of these incidents, UNDOF liaised with both parties to de-escalate the situation. Between 15 and 23 July, airstrikes were reported in Aleppo, Hama, and the interception of two Syrian missiles by Israel in another sign of heighted regional tensions.

Just a few hours ago, the IDF reported that it had fired two missiles, which shot down a Syrian fighter jet that it claimed had infiltrated nearly two kilometres into Israeli airspace. We are closely monitoring the situation. These hostilities demonstrate a disturbing trajectory of increasingly frequent and dangerous confrontations. I call on all parties to abide by all the provisions of the 1974 Agreement and to support the role of UNDOF in that regard.

Turning to Lebanon, Acting Special Coordinator for Lebanon and Under-Secretary-General Lacroix briefed the Council yesterday. Consultations continue, as does United Nations advocacy, including through the International Support Group for Lebanon, to form a new Government that will be able to deliver upon Lebanon's international obligations under resolution 1701 (2006) and its national priorities, in line with recent international conferences in support of the country. The situation in southern Lebanon and along the Blue Line remained calm overall. Ground violations of the Blue Line continued, primarily due to agricultural activity.

In closing, I would like to underline the importance of expediting our collective efforts to address the perilous situation in Gaza. Unless we begin in earnest the crucial work required to change the current deteriorating dynamics, another explosion is almost a certainty. Progress will require de-escalation and calm in Gaza, strengthened coordination with the Palestinian Authority, Israel — which has special obligations — Egypt and the United Nations, in addition to financial support.

The human dimension must be at the forefront of all our efforts. Gazans deserve to live their lives in freedom and dignity. That is their right. It is not a privilege that can be taken hostage or that can be granted or withheld by others who have no regard for their suffering. Israelis living near Gaza also deserve to finally be free of indiscriminate attacks, be it by rockets, mortars or incendiary devices, which have plagued their lives for so many years.

We cannot lose sight of the broader context. Another missed opportunity could have disastrous consequences, including for reaching a broader Israeli-Palestinian peace on the basis of the two-State solution, in which Gaza is an integral part of the future Palestinian State.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): On behalf of the State of Palestine, I wish to congratulate the Russian Federation on its successful presidency of the Security Council in the month of June and express appreciation to Sweden for its able leadership of the Council's important agenda for this month. We also thank Special Coordinator and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, for his briefing and efforts.

This month, the United States of America and the French Republic proudly celebrated the anniversaries of their independence. The United States Declaration of Independence states:

> "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen states that all men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Those truths and rights are universal and inalienable and must be recognized for every nation in the world, with no exception. But during this same month, Israel, the occupying Power, chose to continue its oppression of the Palestinian people — children, youth, women and men — further entrenching its illegal and belligerent military occupation and committing more crimes and human rights violations.

For seven decades, the Palestinian people have borne witness to decisions made under the pretext of security and religious edicts denigrating their rights and national aspirations and dismissing international law and global consensus. They continue to endure colonization, forced displacement, arbitrary detention, unlawful killing and injury on a daily basis, regardless of what they do or do not do.

In the occupied besieged Gaza Strip, the Palestinian people continue to endure an ever-worsening humanitarian crisis and a rapid decline in the socioeconomic situation as a devastating effect of Israel's ongoing occupation, illegal and inhumane blockade and repeated military aggressions. That dire humanitarian situation has put explosive pressure on the infrastructure in the Gaza Strip and caused loss of livelihood for the entire population. Their coping capacities have been severely depleted, as have the hopes and dreams of an entire generation of young people, who have been peacefully protesting the unbearable conditions they have been facing.

However, Israel persists with its wilful killing of Palestinian civilians and its disregard of human life. It is therefore imperative that the international community act urgently to prevent further assaults against Palestinian civilians and cause Israel to lift its more-than-a-decade-long blockade. It is also imperative to mobilize international efforts to ensure sufficient and sustainable funding for United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, given its vital role in Gaza and beyond.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, our people have had to endure the cruelty and violence of the Israeli occupation, including its persistent policy of forced displacement and transfer and demolition of homes and destruction of livelihood, as Israel's illegal settlement campaign persists unabated. Most recently, Israel has advanced its plans to forcibly transfer the Bedouin communities of Abu Nuwar and Khan Al-Ahmar. The known purpose of such plans is to facilitate the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the area, in grave breach of international law and numerous United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

When hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced into exile in 1948, the first thing they built beside their tents was schools, to preserve hope and to arm future generations with knowledge. This year, school opened early in Khan Al-Ahmar to prevent the looming threat of demolition of yet another community of refugees that faces the prospect of being forcibly displaced yet again. One generation after another, our people, despite their resilience and steadfastness, are confronted with the same fate, and we have repeatedly appealed to the international community to address this critical matter. Regrettably, in the absence of concrete international action, the occupying Power remains undeterred, persisting unabated with its crimes in full view of the world, without any fear of consequences.

Those violations are further additional evidence, if any was needed, of the imperative of providing international protection to the Palestinian civilian population. We look forward to the Secretary-General's report and his recommendations on ways and means to provide international protection for the Palestinian people, including through an international protection mechanism, pursuant to General Assembly resolution ES-10/20. We expect this report to be released on 13 August 2018.

Israel's occupation of our land is not the temporary control exerted over a territory as a result of a conflict; it is an effort orchestrated over decades to seize Palestinian land in violation of two cardinal principles of the Charter of the United Nations: the right of a people — in this case, the Palestinian people — to self-determination, and the inadmissibility of the acquisition of land by force. It is not even a hidden plan; it is articulated every day by Israeli leaders and openly conducted in defiance of international law and United Nations resolutions.

Israel, the occupying Power, has been enacting one law after another to consolidate that regime instead of dismantling it. We have just celebrated the centenary of the birth of the universal symbol of freedom, South African anti-apartheid leader and former President of that country, Nelson Mandela. We honoured his legacy and struggle against oppression and injustice, and pledged that the struggle for freedom, equality, dignity and justice continues. That is the time Israel chose to adopt its Jewish nation-State law, which has transformed a situation of de facto apartheid into a situation of apartheid de jure — that is, by law.

That calls to memory the notion of "separate but equal", which was the basis of racial segregation in the United States of America, instituted in 1898 in the infamous case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*. That was an infamous, dark chapter in the history of humankind, and as we witness it again, it will be "separate and unequal". In that regard, I must say that the representative of the State of Israel has another title added to his name: the representative of Jim Crow Israel and its laws.

Israel's ultimate goal is not to achieve peace or a two-State solution. Fourteen years ago, the International Court of Justice considered that the construction of the wall and its associated regime create a fait accompli on the ground that could well become permanent, in which case, and notwithstanding the formal characterization of the wall by Israel, it would be tantamount to de facto annexation.

Is there any doubt left that that is what Israel is pursuing — annexation at the expense of our State and of peace? In the words of a United States peace envoy, Frank Lowenstein, instead of transferring power to the Palestinian side, Israel has transferred it to Israeli settlers. That is the very definition of colonialism. Many countries represented here have experienced it. Their solidarity with the Palestinian people stems from their own history and struggle. The Israeli Government is a Government of settlers, for settlers and by settlers. Israeli officials would proudly recognize it as such. Why can the rest of the world not acknowledge it and act accordingly?

Some may think that the Palestinian tragedy is not grave enough to deserve such attention, and they illustrate their argument by examining each single event in isolation from the others. My advice to them is to look at the bigger picture. This is about the denial of the rights of an entire nation and the mass displacement and replacement of a people, coupled with a policy of confinement for Palestinians and expansion for Jewish Israeli settlers. Is such a policy not grave enough to warrant international attention? We believe that it is grave enough to merit long-overdue international action. The only question that remains is when will the world's patience, which has been te ted repeatedly, finally be exhausted, and will it be before it is too late to salvage peace?

Some say that old ways no longer work. They state that the path we took to achieve peace was flawed, and therefore they want to bring plans that ignore the terms of reference of the peace process and its declared objectives. We agree that old ways no longer work, but let us determine what else does not work. Interim solutions do not work. Postponing the consideration of core issues does not work. Ignoring international law does not work. The lack of accountability for violations does not work. The lack of a binding time frame does not work. The absence of international guarantees does not work.

What works is a peace plan centred on the established international terms of reference for a peaceful solution, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, advanced through a collective process that secures international mobilization and holds the parties accountable. The Palestinian leadership pledges its commitment to peace, its commitment to international law, its commitment to the two-State solution and its commitment to non-violence. We also reaffirm our readiness to cooperate with all international and regional efforts to advance a just peace, as called for by resolution 2334 (2016).

The reunification of our people, land and political system is among our highest national priorities. We will spare no effort to achieve unity. We reaffirm our gratitude to Egypt for its efforts to achieve that aim, and we hope that we will see progress on that front in the coming days.

The Security Council has repeatedly affirmed, as a general principle, that ending impunity is indispensable to achieving peace. By contrast, we are living proof of how accurate that statement is, especially when the Council does not adopt the necessary measures to ensure the implementation of its own resolutions.

Every single State has the power and the duty to help advance peace by upholding its own responsibilities.

We call on all States to respect and ensure respect for international law. We commend the Irish Parliament on its decision to ban settlement products that come from stolen Palestinian land and resources. Peace is not for the parties alone to achieve, nor can the freedom of the oppressed be subject to the good will of the oppressor. Peace requires that each and every one of us do our part. We want peace and look forward to a collective process that can yield peace. We stand ready to be held accountable for our words and actions on the basis of international law. Can the other side commit to the same?

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): On behalf of my delegation, I congratulate the Kingdom of Sweden on assuming the presidency of the Council this month.

Before I begin, I must address the events that took place ts morning. A short while ago, two Patriot missiles were launched at a Syrian Sukhoi fighter jet that infiltrated Israeli airspace. The Israel Defense Forces monitored the advance of the fighter jet, which infiltrated approximately 2 kilometres into Israeli airspace. It was then intercepted by the Patriot missiles. Israel warned Syria not to breach the 1974 Separation of Forces Agreement. Israel will not allow any violation of its sovereignty.

Over the weekend, at the request of our allies, Israel completed a humanitarian effort to rescue 422 members of the White Helmets and their families. The Israeli Government approved their passage through Israel as an important humanitarian gesture. We would like to thank the countries that took part in that humanitarian operation. Israel will continue to provide the Syrian population with humanitarian aid, such as food, medicine and clothing, as it has since the earliest days of the war.

Enough is enough. Too many in the international community continue to criticize our actions while Hamas terrorizes our southern border. This past weekend, an Israel Defense Forces soldier was shot and killed by a Hamas terrorist squad. Hamas terrorists fired more than 200 rockets and mortars into Israel just over a week ago. A 17-year-old girl suffered wounds to her face from a rocket attack. Another rocket struck the courtyard of a synagogue in the Israeli town of Sderot. A balloon filled with explosives landed on the roof of a kindergarten. Sirens blare day and night, and the residents of Israel's southern communities are told to remain within 15 seconds of bomb shelters — 15 seconds. More than 7,400 acres of land in southern Israel — half the size of Manhattan — have been destroyed by Hamas arson attacks. Just imagine if half of Manhattan were set on fire, if eight Central Parks were to burn to the ground by flames set by terrorists.

Israel continues to defend itself. We have destroyed Hamas terror tunnels, one of its training facilities located in a city centre and military targets. We took such steps to protect our people, just as Members represented here would do to protect their people.

Hamas is responsible for those acts of terror. Yet, too many in this building seem to have forgotten what Hamas truly is. Hamas is a terrorist organization. Hamas is to be blamed for holding hostage the entire population of Gaza. Hamas is working closely with the terrorists of Hizbullah in Lebanon and the Iranian regime. Hamas is a regional threat that requires a regional solution. Hamas is also an international problem that calls for international designation. The fanatics of Hamas who terrorize Israelis and Palestinians are sophisticated cold-blooded killers. It is time this body acknowledges that Hamas is no different than Al-Qaida and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). The Council must designate Hamas as a terrorist organization once and for all.

Founded by a group of Muslim Brotherhood activists in 1987, Hamas remains committed to a violent assault against Israel. Its stated goal is creating a Palestinian State "from the river to the sea". Hamas preaches the destruction of Israel and its entire people through suicide bombings, stabbings, kidnappings and any other means of terror it sees fit. From 2000 to 2005, Hamas killed over 1,000 innocent Israelis. It wounded thousands more. Suicide bombers boarded buses and entered restaurants only to blow them up moments later.

In 2005, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered the entire withdrawal of all Israeli presence in Gaza. That meant the complete removal of every pre-existing Jewish community in Gaza, every Israeli Defence Forces soldier and even the bodies from our cemeteries in Gaza. Israel left so the Palestinians could govern themselves in Gaza. They had the opportunity. Israel had removed itself completely — no settlement, no occupation — but Hamas remained. In fact, Hamas grew only stronger.

In 2006, Hamas violently overthrew the Palestinian leadership. It literally threw Fatah leaders off their rooftops. Since then, for 12 years Hamas has done nothing but exploit the Palestinian people and attack Israel. Hamas has built countless terror attack tunnels from Gaza into Israel to kidnap and kill innocent Israelis. This year alone, Israel has destroyed at least 10 of those terror tunnels that crossed into Israel, ending just metres from our communities. In 2017, Israeli security forces stopped over 400 Hamas terror attacks, including 13 planned suicide assaults and eight attempted kidnappings.

It has been 12 years since Hamas seized control of Gaza, and peace in our southern region remains a figment of the imagination. That is because Hamas values death over life. If the Council does not believe me, it should listen to Hamas' leaders themselves. During the recent violent riots, Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in Gaza, addressed the mob next to the fence — delegations can look it up on Google — and demanded that they, the people he sent to the fence, charge the fence into Israel, find innocent Israelis and tear out their hearts from their bodies. The international community must accept that Hamas' true colours are the bloodiest of reds. There is only one remedy — the international community must designate Hamas a terrorist organization.

For many years, Hizbullah in Lebanon has terrorized northern Israel as it pretends to be a political organization, but Hizbullah is not alone today in Lebanon. Hamas has widened its efforts to collaborate with Hizbullah and to cause innocent Israelis as much pain as possible. Both Hamas and Hizbullah are guilty of placing innocent people — whether Lebanese, Palestinian or Israeli — in grave danger. Like Hamas, Hizbullah commits the crime of exploiting civilians as human shields and both terrorist organizations enjoy tremendous resources, equipment and training from Iran.

Hamas leaders boast about those terror ties themselves. Yahya Sinwar bragged that Hamas has

> "excellent relations with our brothers in Hizbullah. We work together and coordinate and we are in touch almost on a daily basis".

Over the past few months, Hamas has amplified its activities in Lebanon. We have warned the Security Council about this, but nothing has changed. Hamas is part of an international operation, one that crosses borders from Turkey, to Lebanon, to Syria and finishes in Iran. Through this network and with the funding and sponsorship of Iran, Hamas has established missile and unmanned aerial vehicle factories in southern Lebanon. It has built training camps to teach thousands of Palestinian terrorists in Lebanon.

The scale of Hamas activities would not be possible without the unwavering support of the Iranian regime. Despite clear Sunni-Shia differences, Iran provides nearly $100 million annually to Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Hamas leaders, including the prominent Saleh Al-Arouri, have met with Iranian officials on many occasions. Ali Akbar Velayati, a top aide to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, stated:

> "We are proud of supporting the Palestinian resistance and Hamas movement. The Iranian leadership and our people will continue to support the resistance led by Hamas and Islamic Jihad."

Just this month at the so-called Wet Gunpowder Festival — apparently, it is festival — Qasem Soleimani, Commander of the Quds force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, was scheduled to address the entire population of Gaza through a live broadcast from Tehran. A technical malfunction stopped the speech from taking place, but that type of direct communication to all of Gaza shows only one thing — that the ties between Hamas and Iran are stronger than ever.

With Iran's support, Hamas is becoming a regional and international threat. Iran has already built a strong influence in Lebanon, giving $700 million a year to Hizbullah. Iran already has near control over Syria. It provides the regime with $4 billion per year and thousands of fighters. We simply cannot allow Gaza to become another Iranian outpost. Designating Hamas as a terrorist organization would reaffirm the international community's obligation to combat terrorism.

Terrorism knows no borders, colours or creeds. Terrorism strikes the cafés of Paris, the towers of New York and the streets of Tel Aviv. Hamas, Al-Qaida and ISIS share the same immediate goal of killing innocent people and disrupting international peace. Therefore, designating Hamas as a terrorist organization should be no less obvious than designating Al-Qaida and ISIS. The United Nations should designate as terrorists to be sanctioned Hamas leaders, such as Yahya Sinwar, who is guilty of committing over 50 terror attacks; Ismail Haniyeh, who is responsible for countless innocent deaths and is a supporter of Osama bin Laden;

and Khaled Mashal, who is guilty of executing 38 Palestinians who tried to resist Hamas.

Hamas continues to hold hostage two Israeli civilians and the abducted bodies of two fallen Israeli soldiers, Oron Shaul and Hadar Goldin, and refuses to return them. They also refuse to allow visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross or any other third party and to provide information about their fate or conditions. It is inconceivable that it has been over four years since our two soldiers were killed and their bodies are still being held by Hamas terrorists. I remind members of the Council that Hadar Goldin was killed after a United Nations sanctioned ceasefire was implemented. It is the responsibility of the United Nations to ensure the return of their bodies for proper burial in Israel. Failure to do so is a standing violation of international humanitarian law. One cannot demand humanitarian assistance to Gaza, which we support, while refusing to ensure the basic humanitarian rights of returning our captive and fallen.

Hamas directs violent attacks of rockets and flaming kites at Israeli civilians. It diverts supplies that go to Gaza to build terror tunnels. It uses civilian buildings and objects to launch attacks, and it uses Palestinian civilians — men, women and children — as human shields. Hamas — the organization that is responsible for the suffering of so many Israelis and Palestinians — fundamentally violates co-obligations of international humanitarian law. Hamas continues to display total disregard for all the values that the international community holds dear, including humanity, the protection of civilians and respect for international law. The international community cannot stand by idly.

Before I conclude, dozens of countries have designated Hamas as a terrorist organization. They did not do it out of sympathy for Israel. They did it because they understand that Hamas is a worldwide terror threat. By calling Hamas anything other than what it is, one becomes the launch pad for its rockets. In the last debate in the Security Council about the conflict (see S/PV.8244), here in this Chamber, a majority of Security Council members could not condemn Hamas. The majority of States members of the General Assembly had the courage to support the United States. Therefore, if this organ is serious about peace and security, it will designate Hamas as a terrorist organization once and for all.

The President: I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I would like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing. Before I go to the main point of my remarks, I want to emphasize one item that Mr. Mladenov touched upon. In the past three months, the terrorist flaming swastika kites that have crossed over from Gaza into Israel have damaged or destroyed 7,500 acres of land. Israel is a small country. The equivalent proportion of land in the United States would be the size of the entire state of Connecticut. In France, the equivalent would be 10 times the entire land area of the city of Paris. That is no small thing. If it were happening to any of our countries, there would be quite a lot of discussion of it. While the international media pays very careful attention to every step Israel takes in self-defence, we must not lose sight of the very real damage that is being done to Israel by terrorist attacks coming from Gaza.

The main purpose of my remarks today is to shed light on another important and frequently overlooked issue when it comes to the Palestinian community. If one were to judge every nation's commitment to the Palestinian people by the words that are spoken in the Security Council and in the General Assembly, one would come away with an extremely distorted picture. Here at the United Nations — thousands of miles away from Palestinians, who do have real needs — there is no end to the speeches on their behalf. Country after country claims solidarity with the Palestinian people. If those words were useful in the schools, hospitals and streets of their communities, the Palestinian people would not be facing the desperate conditions that we are discussing here today. Talk is cheap. No group of countries is more generous with their words than the Palestinians' Arab neighbours and other States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. But all of the words spoken here in New York do not feed, clothe or educate a single Palestinian child. All they do is get the international community riled up.

Let us take the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for example. Last year, Iran's contribution to UNRWA was zero. Algeria's contribution to UNRWA was zero, and Tunisia's contribution to UNRWA was zero. Other countries did provide some funding. Pakistan gave $20,000. Egypt gave $20,000, and Oman gave $668,000. Now, it is not only the Arab and Islamic countries that warrant highlighting. Other countries

talk a big game about the Palestinian cause. In 2017, China provided $350,000 to UNRWA. Russia provided $2 million to UNRWA. Moving up the list, Turkey gave $6.7 million. Kuwait gave $9 million, and the United Arab Emirates gave $12.8 million.

Again, if a nation's commitment to the Palestinian people is judged by the words heard in this Chamber, the conclusion might be drawn that the United States has been less generous simply because we stand proudly with our ally, Israel, here at the United Nations. But once again, that conclusion would be entirely false. Last year, while Algeria was providing nothing to UNRWA and Turkey was providing $6.7 million, the United States gave $364 million. That is 10 times the combined amounts from every country that I just named. Moreover, that is in addition to what the American people give annually to the Palestinians in bilateral assistance, which was another $300 million just last year and averages more than a quarter-of-a-billion dollars every year since 1993. Since that year, the United States has provided over $6 billion in bilateral assistance to Palestinians. How much have the Arab countries — some of which are wealthy — given to the Palestinians? It does not come anywhere close to what the United States has done. Words at the United Nations or actions on the streets and in the schools of Palestinian communities, which matters more?

Judging by the vitriol that is directed towards the United States from the Palestinian representatives, including the one here today, and from some of their allies, one might fairly conclude that our support is unappreciated or unwelcome. Americans are very generous people. We are humanitarian-oriented people, and we continue to seek ways to help the Palestinian people, whose plight is of genuine concern to us. But we are not fools. If we extend a hand in friendship and generosity, we do not expect our hand to be bitten. As we extend our hand, we also expect others to extend their hands as well.

Importantly, this is not an issue of funding alone. Where are the Arab countries when it comes to encouraging reconciliation between Palestinian factions, which is essential to peace? Where are the Arab countries when it comes to denouncing Hamas terrorism? Where are the Arab countries when it comes to supporting compromises that are necessary for peace? Too often, the Arab countries give just enough money and mouth just enough uncompromising words to stay out of the crosshairs of Palestinian representatives.

But if they really cared about the Palestinian people, they would not do that. Instead, they would condemn extremism and they would put forth serious ideas for compromises that could end the struggle and lead to a better life for the Palestinian people. They would tell the Palestinian leadership how foolish they look for condemning a peace proposal they have not even seen yet. The Palestinian leadership has been allowed to live a false reality for too long, because Arab leaders are afraid to tell them the truth. The United States is telling the truth, because we do care about the Palestinian people. But we should all recognize that Palestinians' needs are not an American problem any more than they are a Russian or French problem. And they are certainly not more of an American problem than an Egyptian, Saudi, Emirati or Turkish problem. So the next time we have a meeting like this one in the Security Council or the General Assembly and we hear speech after speech about the plight of the Palestinian people, I would ask those who are making those speeches to examine what their countries are doing to help besides speechmaking. It is time for the States of the region, in particular, to step up and really help the Palestinian people instead of just making speeches thousands of miles away.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his report.

Russia supports building up the international efforts to resolve crisis situations, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. That vast region, which stretches from the borders of Lebanon or Syria and Israel to the Persian Gulf and Western Sahara, is unfortunately still teetering on the edge of another escalation, in a fragile situation that could collapse as a result of a minor political miscalculation or careless step. The consequences of such a scenario could be disastrous for the whole world. In such circumstances, preventive diplomacy is particularly vital. It is too late to take steps to forestall conflicts that are already at an acute stage of armed confrontation. The focus has to be on finding peaceful solutions. But in the case of Palestine it is still possible to put the situation back on the political track, preventing a new round of violence in the very heart of the Middle East.

The state of affairs in the Palestinian-Israeli settlement is extremely worrying. Recent events in and around Gaza have confirmed that violence is filling the vacuum that has formed in the absence of any progress

in resuming the political process. The report of the Quartet of international mediators on a settlement in the Middle East warned of this threat as long ago as July 2016 and also talked about how to prevent such a development. Regrettably, we have been obliged to conclude that none of its recommendations in that regard have been fulfilled. The problems of illegal Israeli settlements, the Israeli authorities' destruction of Palestinian property and provocative rhetoric on both sides have only worsened. We are worried about the increasing tendency to take unilateral approaches that do not contribute to the implementation of the agreements previously reached within the framework of international organizations, chief among them the United Nations. We are firmly convinced of the inadmissibility of any actions that prejudge the outcome of the peace talks. Attempts to reinforce the new realities on the ground through national legislation do nothing to advance the cause of peace.

The only possible path to a settlement is a direct dialogue between the parties to the conflict that can lead to achieving a two-State formula based on internationally recognized foundations, including the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. Russia is ready to give every assistance to a resumption and to do it in cooperation with the other international players, including through the Quartet. We will continue to work through our bilateral relations with Israel and Palestine. President Putin of Russia held constructive talks with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas during their stay in Moscow a few days ago. So far these have been separate meetings, but our offer of holding a Palestinian-Israeli summit in Russia remains on the table. I want to emphasize that our proposal has the agreement of the Palestinian side. Our principled vision was again presented to Israel during our Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to West Jerusalem just the other day. We value the role of the other countries of the region with regard to Palestine and Israel, especially Egypt and Jordan. We are helping our Egyptian partners in their efforts to resolve the division in the Palestinian ranks through our contacts with a wide range of Palestinian factions.

We support the international aid to Palestine, including through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). I listened carefully to what my colleague Mrs. Haley said about that. I would like to believe that after such an emotional performance there will be a qualitative change in the situation in that regard. UNRWA's activities go beyond its purely humanitarian mission and are an important stabilizing factor for Palestine and the entire region. Serious consequences are likely if its work falters owing to a lack of financial resources.

Progress in resuming the Palestinian-Israeli political process will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the overall situation in the Middle East and North Africa. It is crucial that we all work to unite our efforts in that regard and in other areas, including Syria, Yemen and Libya. It will also be important not to cut back our support to the authorities in Iraq for the future stabilization of the situation there. Helping Syrian refugees to return to their homeland will contribute both to normalizing the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and to relieving the socioeconomic situation in the countries that are hosting refugees, especially Syria's neighbours Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

As we see it, the Security Council debate held at Russia's initiative on 25 June (see S/PV.8293) affirmed the urgent need for coming up with a positive and unifying common agenda on the Middle East for the Security Council and the entire international community. We have to translate that vision into practical action while preserving the collective-security instruments we already have, such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for Iran's nuclear programme, which has a crucial role to play in the global non-proliferation regime and whose preservation will help to prevent an uncontrolled rise in tensions in the region.

Russia is ready to participate in these efforts with all interested partners on a basis of an open and impartial dialogue, as exemplified in the recent talks between President Putin and President Trump in Helsinki.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China would first like to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing and commend him for his active efforts to de-escalate the tensions in the region.

The current relations between Palestine and Israel are deeply troubling. The situation in Gaza remains fragile and tense and we cannot afford to ignore the possibility that the violent clashes there may escalate further. The prospects for a two-State solution are unclear, and the efforts for a resumption of talks between the two sides are stalled, while the construction of settlements continues and Palestinian houses are still being demolished. China is deeply concerned about the

developments on the ground and the casualties from the conflicts. The use of force and efforts to prevent violence with violence will not solve any problems.

We strongly condemn the wilful use of force and oppose violence against civilians. We urge all parties to bear in mind the safety and security of the people of the region and the imperative of peaceful coexistence by exercising restraint in order to prevent the situation from escalating. The dire humanitarian situation in Gaza only undermines regional stability. We hope that the parties concerned will fully lift the Gaza blockade as soon as possible.

The two-State solution is the optimal way to resolve the conflict between Palestine and Israel. The international community should abide by the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative in scaling up its efforts for the resumption of talks. Concrete actions should be taken to implement resolution 2334 (2016) and cease all settlement activities in the occupied territories and the demolition of Palestinian houses and property. Steps should also be taken to prevent violence against civilians.

The international community should remain united in pushing for an early resumption of the peace talks between the two sides. The parties should meet each other halfway and refrain not only from any action or rhetoric that might aggravate the situation but also from any unilateral action that might undermine trust, so as to create the conditions necessary for a resumption of the dialogue. Parties that can bring influence to bear on the question of the Middle East should play a constructive role in that respect.

China appreciates the efforts made by Egypt and others to actively promote national reconciliation in Palestine. We support the convening of a new international conference on the question of Palestine and the exploring of innovative mechanisms to facilitate peace in the Middle East so as to break the deadlock in Palestinian-Israeli talks as soon as possible.

China firmly supports the establishment of an independent and fully sovereign State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We support the greater integration of Palestine into the international community. At the opening ceremony of the eighth ministerial meeting of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, on 10 July, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced another ¥100 million in aid to Palestine in support of its economic development and to improve living conditions there.

China will continue to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to Palestine and make an additional contribution of $2 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. In this regard, China has always done what it believes it should do, to the extent possible. We have no intention of competing with any other country.

Peace, reform and development are the common requirements of the countries of the Middle East. Stability, tranquillity and happiness are the shared aspirations of the people of the region. We should address hot-spot issues in the Middle East in a peaceful, just, constructive and inclusive manner.

To be specific, we should, first, remain committed to a political solution and facilitate dialogue and negotiations so as to stop the vicious circle of violence for violence; secondly, be impartial and refrain from imposing compromises so that stability can turn into lasting peace rather than to a mere hiatus in turmoil; thirdly, manage the situation in a constructive manner that takes into consideration both history and reality, so as to gradually build momentum for ending the violence and improving the situation; and, fourthly, accommodate the legitimate rights and interests of all parties and refrain from making exclusive arrangements, with a view to building an open and stable framework for peace in the region.

Finally, I should like to reiterate that China stands ready to work with the countries of the region to better align our strategies and actions. We are committed to safeguarding peace and stability in the Middle East, upholding equity and justice, promoting common development and advocating mutual learning and friendship, with a view to contributing to the building of a community with a shared future for humankind.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we wish to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing on recent developments in the occupied territory, which revealed the serious situation there. We commend him for his endeavours and reiterate our full support for his efforts to de-escalate the situation so as to avoid confrontation.

We are meeting once again, unfortunately, against the backdrop of a tense situation in the occupied territory owing to the recent escalation there that took place this past weekend in Gaza. The Israeli occupying forces continued their acts of aggression and attacks against the people of Gaza through the most intensive air campaign against the Gaza Strip since the aggression of 2014, which killed two children, injured dozens of people and damaged many civilian facilities.

We heard Mr. Mladenov say that this aggression had led the situation to the brink of war. This only compounds the crimes committed by Israel, the occupying Power, in targeting the Palestinian people with live ammunition, as has been the case since the beginning of the Great March of Return, last March, which claimed the lives of nearly 150 martyrs, including 22 children. More than 15,000 people were also injured, and many were permanently disabled. We condemn the targeting of innocent civilians by anyone, anywhere and at any time, and hold Israel, the occupying Power, fully responsible for the latest acts of violence and escalation.

We reiterate our support for the struggle of the Palestinian people in defence of all they hold sacred and their inalienable rights. We condemn the wide-ranging practices of Israel, the occupying Power, and its systematic policies against the unarmed Palestinian people, which amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity under international humanitarian and human rights law.

We call on the Security Council to implement its relevant resolutions to protect the Palestinian civilians, in particular resolutions 904 (1994) and 605 (1987), which state that the Fourth Geneva Convention is applicable to the occupied Palestinian territory. We look forward to the report of the Secretary-General on the provision of international protection to the Palestinian people, in line with General Assembly resolution ES-10/20, adopted on 13 June.

We condemn the decision of the Israeli occupying Power to tighten its grip on the Gaza population, which has been suffering under a more than decade-long blockade, particularly the closing of the Karam Abu Salem crossing, which, as we all know, is the only commercial crossing for the import and export of goods to and from the Gaza Strip. That will only aggravate the humanitarian crisis, as it cuts off all vital supplies and prohibits exports while endangering the entire Gaza population of 2 million people, half of whom are children. We stress the importance of working to put an end to the economic and humanitarian crisis facing the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza, as a result of the unjust blockade. We call on the international community and international organizations to put pressure on Israel in order to lift its blockade on the Strip and open the crossings over which it has full control, immediately and permanently.

This decision, in addition to the financial challenges facing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as a result of the closure and the blockade, as well as the constraints on the delivery of assistance, will only increase the humanitarian suffering of the Palestinian people. We also share Mr. Mladenov's concern over the annual deficit of UNRWA's budget and stress the importance of providing the Agency's programmes and activities with the necessary financial support given that such funding is an international responsibility. However, the total of what we have provided to the Agency over the past five years amounts to $55 million and we will continue our support.

We recently noted that Israel, the occupying Power, has continued to change the rules on the ground as it has begun to undermine the basic rights of the Palestinian people. The Knesset recently enacted a number of illegal decisions, including the final adoption of the law transferring authority over Palestinian occupied territories from the Israeli Supreme Court to the Administrative Affairs Court, which would limit the number of petitions by Palestinians, in addition to the law pertaining to the nation State of the Jewish people, which entrenches Israeli racism and threatens the existence of Palestinians. Another decision allows the Israeli occupying Power to withhold the tax revenues of $300 million levied by Israel on behalf of the Palestinian Government. That decision is just one of the punitive financial measures taken by Israel that contravene international law and the relevant agreements between the Israeli and Palestinian sides.

We reiterate our categorical rejection of all illegal decisions that constitute de facto annexation under the Israeli High Court's decision of 25 May 2018, allowing the forced relocation of Palestinian Bedouin communities located in Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu and the destruction of their houses so as to build more new Israeli settlements, which would divide the West Bank apart and eliminate the possibility of the two-State solution. Such repeated violations in the

occupied territories should be met with international rejection. We condemn the expansionist and illegal settlement policies of Israel throughout the territories of the State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, since 1967. We stress that Israeli settlements are illegitimate and will never be accepted de facto. They violate international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention, and seek to partition the Palestinian territory and undermine its geographical connectivity.

All of this demonstrates that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to disregard all the relevant international resolutions. We are therefore collectively responsible for calling for the implementation of all the relevant resolutions pertaining to the Palestinian question, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003) and 2334 (2016), which emphasizes, inter alia, that Israeli settlements constitute a flagrant violation of international law and an impediment to peace. It also calls on Israel to immediately and fully cease all settlement activities in the Palestinian occupied territory, including East Jerusalem, and stresses that the international community will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 borders, including Jerusalem.

We welcome Mr. Mladenov's efforts, in cooperation with the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, to improve health-care, energy and water infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. We affirm that the Government of Kuwait has decided to disburse $2 million earmarked for the revitalization and development of infrastructure in the southern part of the Gaza Strip, and we commend the efforts of Egypt to promote Palestinian national reconciliation, especially in the light of recent positive indications that an arrangement might be reached to put reconciliation efforts back on track.

In conclusion, we emphasize that we are committed to the two-State solution and to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with international resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative in all its aspects, according to which peace with Israel and the normalization of relations must be preceded by an end to the occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories since 1967. Israel must recognize the State of Palestine and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I would like to thank the delegation of Sweden for this well-conceived debate and express its appreciation to our colleagues for their timely insights for follow-up action. We express our sincere appreciation to Special Coordinator Mladenov for his insightful and comprehensive briefing, as always.

We are concerned that the frequency and intensity of individual conflicts in the wider region of the Middle East and North Africa have heightened, with grave consequences and with potential implications for global insecurity. Those violent conflicts, ranging from the Palestinian-Israel situation, Syria and the Golan Heights to Yemen, seriously impact countries in Africa, South and South-East Asia, Europe and other regions. The only viable solution is to have greater rapprochement, cooperation and confidence-building among States Members of the United Nations and members of the Security Council.

Due to the vacuum of functioning State institutions, terrorist groups have found a firm foothold in unstable areas. That has resulted in the massive exodus of refugees from numerous countries, and the burden is borne by host countries, like Jordan and Lebanon, that require international support. We would like to thank the Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Jamie McGoldrick, for visiting the Gaza Strip. We call on the Israeli parties and the Palestinian Authority to immediately act to prevent the further deterioration of the humanitarian situation resulting from increased restrictions on movement. We were heartened to learn that the Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People of the United Nations Development Programme is launching innovative income-generating initiatives in Gaza to mitigate the impact of the harsh socioeconomic conditions and conditions resulting from climate change.

We echo the concerns of Special Coordinator Mladenov regarding the consequences of Israel's decision to temporarily suspend imports and exports, with the exception of basic humanitarian supplies, through the Kerem Shalom crossing. We too urge the authorities to reverse that decision as soon as possible to mitigate hardship and calm tensions.

All parties to the conflict should come forward to maintain calm, stop incendiary kites and prevent other provocations. For the benefit of both sides — Palestinian and Israeli — and others, all must step back from the path of confrontation and escalation.

We underscore Mr. Mladenov's visit to Gaza on 15 July, during which he made every effort to ensure that all parties concerned step back from confrontation. We call on the United Nations to continue its engagement with Israeli and Palestinian counterparts, as well as regional and international partners, to reduce tensions, support intra-Palestinian reconciliation and resolve all humanitarian challenges.

With regard to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Kazakhstan reiterates the need to support that most vital of mechanisms and urges avoiding any shortfall. Kazakhstan endorses the concern expressed earlier by the Special Coordinator about the funding of UNRWA this year. We see the value of convening the meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly for the Announcement of Voluntary Contributions to UNRWA held on 25 June. Unfortunately, despite such extraordinary efforts, as of mid-2018 UNRWA faces a financial gap of $256 million. At risk are education, health care and emergency and social services that contribute to the dignity and hope of 5.3 million Palestine refugees. More important, meeting human needs leads to social content and subsequently to the stability of the region.

Lastly, today's discussion should help us move constructively forward, through dialogue, confidence-building measures and the equal distribution of resources, as presented in profound treatises and manifestos on war and peace. The crises of the Middle East compel us to reach urgent political settlements and development and security measures for the sake of overall peace.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): First, I very much thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing, but more broadly, for his commitment and that of his team.

We have been saying it for years — the false status quo that seems to prevail on the ground is, in reality, a situation that is deteriorating daily and which could unravel and become an open crisis at any moment. When peace recedes on the ground, it also recedes in minds and in speeches, as highlighted in last month's written report (S/2018/614) on resolution 2334 (2016), which we again welcome in both content and form. Generation after generation, Palestinians and Israelis are becoming more estranged and are losing hope of a settlement to the conflict, yet neither the passage of time nor the proliferation of crises in the Middle East trivializes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or calls into question its centrality for the entire region. Beyond its daily consequences for Israelis and Palestinians, its historical and symbolic significance is a determining factor for regional stability. The Security Council therefore cannot and must not at any cost abdicate its responsibility and turn its back on the subject.

Regarding the ongoing situation in Gaza, since 30 March waves of violence have threatened to lead to a new armed conflict. Three such conflicts have occurred in the Gaza Strip over the past decade. More than 150 Palestinians have been killed, including 115 in demonstrations and 68 on 14 May alone. France has condemned the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force and called on Israel to respect the right of Palestinians to demonstrate peacefully. We have also denounced the exploitation by Hamas and other armed groups of the demonstrations and its stated desire to use them to breach the security fence. Finally, we have condemned the firing of rockets and incendiary devices into Israeli territory — hundreds of them since late May, which is unprecedented since the 2014 conflict — as well as the construction of offensive tunnels by Hamas.

The latest developments this week run the risk of causing a brutal escalation that must be avoided at all costs. In this extremely tense context, it is up to the Council to speak with a strong voice to prevent the escalation. The silence it has observed since the beginning of the crisis is deafening and, frankly, incomprehensible. It must give way to a clear public message.

The violence of recent weeks cannot be separated from the broader situation in the Gaza Strip. Beyond the de-escalation and respect for the 2014 ceasefire, which are urgently required, there can be no lasting solution in Gaza without Palestinian reconciliation within the framework of the Palestine Liberation Organization principles, and without the restoration of power of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza.

In that connection, we welcome the relaunching of the process initiated in Cairo in October, which must be accompanied by concrete actions on the part of the Palestinian Authority to improve the living conditions of the population in Gaza. We welcome the initial decisions taken in that regard. Beyond that, only a lifting of the blockade, accompanied by the necessary

security guarantees for Israel, will make it possible to meet the needs of the population.

Alongside those efforts, an ambitious response must be made to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The Special Coordinator's proposals for the accelerated implementation of priority projects deserve our full support. Those proposals must be accompanied by quick-impact humanitarian measures, which are necessary to provide the population with a visible response and to prevent further escalation.

In the same spirit, a collective leap is needed to enable the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to continue its essential activities and to ensure the start of the school year, both in Gaza and throughout the region. The stakes are too high for the population concerned and for the stability of the region. Given its historical role in promoting regional stability, we warmly call on the United States to shoulder its responsibility and uphold its commitments on this key issue in the context of the much-needed international mobilization to boost UNRWA's budget.

Furthermore, the risks of escalation in Gaza must not make us forget the gravity of the situation in the West Bank and Jerusalem. The latest developments in settlement policies threaten more than ever to irreversibly call the two-State solution into question. In that connection, I would like to highlight two particularly serious points.

First, announcements of new construction in settlements continue. After the 30 May announcements of 3,500 new housing units in the West Bank, there were further announcements in late June of more than 1,000 new housing units in Jerusalem, in the Pisgat Ze'ev settlement.

Secondly, forced demolitions and displacements of populations are now directly targeting areas long identified as red lines by the international community. This is the case in the E-1 area, where Israel's appropriation would separate the north and south of the West Bank and isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian territories. Destroying the continuity of the Palestinian territories would make it impossible for the two States, both with Jerusalem as their capital, to find a solution. It would, instead, favour a strategy of the de facto annexation of the West Bank by Israel. The Khan Al-Ahmar community is directly targeted, including structures that have received European funding. Some 230 inhabitants, including nearly 160 children, are threatened with expulsion. In the neighbouring community of Abu Nuwar, demolitions were carried out earlier this month, displacing some 50 people, including more than 30 children. South of Hebron, similar threats hang over the Palestinian village of Susya.

In that connection, I reiterate that France's position on settlements will not change. Settlement-building is illegal under international law. It violates the Fourth Geneva Convention and several Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016), adopted on 23 December 2016. Settlement activity is dangerous. It aggravates tensions between populations and fuels violence. Finally, settlement-building is counterproductive, as it gradually destroys the two-State solution, both on the ground and on the political level.

This leads me to my last point, concerning the lack of a viable alternative to the two-State solution. The single territorial unit that seems to be taking shape before our eyes would ultimately result in the unequal coexistence of two citizenship regimes on the same territory. It would mean, for the Palestinians, the abandonment of their aspirations to statehood; and for the Israelis, the end of their democratic project. While we must fill the current political vacuum, a peace plan that turns its back on the internationally agreed parameters of the two-State solution would be doomed to failure. Any negotiations must take place within that framework, which is itself based on international law and Council resolutions, including resolution 478 (1980) on Jerusalem.

As we all know, the destinies of Israelis and Palestinians are intertwined. Neither people can sustainably achieve its national aspirations at the expense of the other. As a friend of both Israelis and Palestinians, France has only one objective — the implementation, through negotiation, of the two-State solution, the only one capable of achieving a just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. It will spare no effort in that regard.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru welcomes the convening of this quarterly debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. It also thanks Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing.

Regarding the sensitive issue of the question of Palestine and its repercussions for regional and global stability, we wish to share three concerns.

First, with respect to the escalation of violence, we note with concern the rigidity of the positions, the lack of dialogue and the intensification of hostilities, which constitute a highly volatile environment with unpredictable consequences. The situation is particularly unsettled in Gaza due to violence, which we regret. Peru recognizes the Palestinian people's rights and freedoms of association and expression, and stresses that they must be exercised in a peaceful manner. In this regard, we emphasize that Hamas and the leaders of the demonstrations in Gaza should refrain from provoking incidents near the Israeli fence.

Peru strongly condemns the firing of rockets and incendiary devices that endanger the lives of civilians and cause material damage, levelling thousands of hectares of crops. At the same time, we emphasize that, in accordance with international humanitarian law, the legitimacy of Israel's self-defence depends on its adherence to the principles of proportionality and precaution. In this regard, we emphasize that lethal force must be used only as a last resort, under imminent threat of death or serious injury. Peru regrets and strongly condemns that the victims of Israeli military action include numerous minors, journalists, health-care personnel and civilians not involved in the conflict.

We reject the generalization according to which the entire Gaza population belongs to the ranks of Hamas. The scenario is extremely complex and sensitive, and requires the leaders of both parties to act with moderation and commitment to peace, with respect for international law and the Charter of the United Nations. This calls for, among other things, a halt to and reversal of settlement activities, the demolition of buildings and evictions in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, which undermine the possibilities of a two-State solution and contravene the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016).

Secondly, with respect to the humanitarian situation, Peru regrets the progressive deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and underlines the urgency of addressing its root causes. In that light, we consider the recovery of control of Gaza and its border crossings by the Palestinian Authority to be a priority. We also consider necessary the cessation of measures of retaliation against the civilian population, such as the reduction of the Palestinian fishing area in Gaza's waters or restrictions on the flow of fuel and construction materials through the Kerem Shalom pass. We welcome the recent Israeli announcement in this regard.

We highlight the Mr. Mladenov's concrete efforts to alleviate the suffering of civilians, reduce tensions and prevent escalation, as well as the decision of the Egyptian Government to arrange the opening in May of the Rafah crossing, which is vital to millions of Palestinians. We also highlight the important work carried out by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in the provision of essential services, as well as the need to provide it with stable financing to overcome its current deep financial crisis.

Thirdly, on the political solution, Peru believes that the necessary relief of human suffering must be complemented by the renewal of the parties' commitment to the peace process and the urgent resumption of negotiations leading to a solution based on two States and the 1967 borders.

I wish to refer briefly to the situation in Yemen, and specifically to developments in the port of Al-Hudaydah. The situation, which constitutes the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today, remains highly volatile and of great danger to the civilian population. We emphasize that there is no military solution to the conflict and that the humanitarian consequences of an attack on Al-Hudaydah — the main port through which most of the food, medicine and fuel consumed in Yemen arrives, and which is home to hundreds of thousands civilians — are highly unpredictable.

We therefore welcome the ceasefire arranged by the coalition, and we hope that it will become definitive. We express our recognition and full support for the dynamic and outstanding diplomatic action carried out by Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, with all the parties concerned, to bring positions closer and avoid further escalation. We believe that these efforts, starting with the ceasefire arranged in Al-Hudaydah and an eventual settlement on the management of that important port, can and should be complemented by an authentic commitment on the part of all parties, in good faith and without preconditions, to the inclusive political solution that Mr. Griffiths has been promoting and, in short, to sustaining an agreement that puts an end to the

conflict and the humanitarian crisis affecting millions of Yemenis.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I join others in thanking Special Coordinator Mladenov and his team for their dedication to the Middle East peace process and for today's valuable briefing. We meet in difficult times, in which Mr. Mladenov's involvement and actions are crucial, and we commend him for his work.

I align myself with the statement to be made later by the observer of the European Union.

I will focus on the following three issues: first, the ongoing crisis in Gaza; secondly, impediments to the two-State solution and the peace process; and thirdly, the Golan Heights and regional dynamics.

First, on the ongoing crisis in Gaza, during the past months the Council has met several times to discuss the crisis situation in Gaza. We need de-escalation, maximum restraint and urgent measures to alleviate the humanitarian situation. That has been the call by so many in the Council — to prevent a new escalation of violence to step back from the brink. But unfortunately, today again I start my intervention by calling attention to the dire situation in Gaza. We have to conclude, especially after last weekend, that Gaza is still on the brink of war.

We welcome the current truce. Now all parties should do everything in their power to prevent further escalation. They should implement measures to improve the living conditions in Gaza. The daily lives of the people of Gaza have to improve. That means that economic development, humanitarian aid and rebuilding infrastructure need to go hand in hand.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands strongly opposes the sending of incendiary kites and balloons from Gaza into Israel, leading to forest fires and damage to Israeli crops. We also strongly oppose the building of tunnels. We call on the de facto authorities in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority to do everything possible to ensure that this practice stops.

We welcome the reopening of the Rafah crossing by Egypt, and we encourage Egypt to keep it open. We welcome today's reopening of Kerem Shalom for goods. Much-needed fuel for the people of Gaza is entering today. This is a first important step in the restoration of the permanent opening of the Kerem Shalom crossing. The opening of crossings is paramount and helps to decrease the already immense pressure on the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We call upon Israel to ease restrictions on the movement of goods and people, while safeguarding its own security needs.

The restoration of payment of public-service employee salaries is another measure that is needed to improve the economic conditions in Gaza. The situation there underlines the urgent need for intra-Palestinian reconciliation. Gaza and the West Bank need to be reunited under one single and legitimate Palestinian Authority. We welcome the renewed efforts of Egypt in this regard and call on all parties to engage constructively.

United Nations efforts to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza are of the utmost importance. We once again express our full support for the efforts of Mr. Mladenov in that regard and for his plans for Gaza. We would like to ask Mr. Mladenov if there are any remaining hurdles to starting the swift implementation of his plans, and how the international community, and certainly the Council, canassist in making his plans a reality. We also support the new efforts by the United Nations Development Programme, creating emergency jobs for youth and women in Gaza. We remain concerned about the financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and call on all to support the Agency. The Kingdom of the Netherlands has been an important UNRWA donor for many years. If its funding gap is not closed soon, UNRWA will not be able to continue the provision of the delivery of basic services in Gaza and elsewhere. More countries have to contribute.

The situation in Gaza is a stark reminder of the urgent need for a political horizon and for a genuine peace process leading to a two-State solution within existing parameters, based on 1967 lines.

That brings me to my second point, namely, impediments to the two-State solution and to the peace process. The last couple of weeks have shown a rapid deterioration of the situation on the ground with several legislative developments. The pending Israeli decision on the demolition of Khan Al-Ahmar is a pertinent example. That village is located in the so-called E1 Area and is seen by many as the last corridor that connects Palestinian lands on the West Bank. It can thus be described as essential for the viability of a future Palestinian State.

Together with many of our fellow European Union (EU) member States, and as has been expressed by

the EU High Representative, the Kingdom of the Netherlands objects to the planned Israeli demolitions in Area C. We call upon Israel to respect its obligations under international law, and we consider the settlements to be illegal under international law.

In line with the foregoing, we are concerned about the developments around the so-called Jewish nation-State bill. That bill seems to imply that Jews alone have the right to national self-determination in Israel, while downgrading Arabic from its status as an official language and encouraging the building of Jewish settlements. It is difficult to see how that contributes to a two-State solution.

Furthermore, we have concerns about the bill recently passed in the Knesset on revenue clearance. It enables the Israeli Government to withhold tax revenues it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority as compensation for their contribution to Palestinian prisoners and their families. We consider that bill to be contrary to the Paris Protocol and the Oslo Accords. We also call upon the Palestinian Authority to change the system of payments to prisoners and their families. The issue has the potential to incite violence and is thus an impediment to the peace process.

All developments underline the need for the resumption of meaningful negotiations, leading to a two-State solution based on known parameters and addressing all final status issues. We are therefore very interested in the American plans in this regard. We emphasize the important role of the Quartet in the peace process, and we underline the need for countries of the region to be involved.

My third point concerns regional dynamics and the situation in the Golan Heights. We are concerned about the increased tensions in that area, including the Israeli border with Syria. We call on the parties to refrain from actions that can further destabilize the area, and we welcome all de-escalating measures. The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the evacuation of the White Helmets last weekend, which serves as a good example of international cooperation in the region.

Unrest in the region requires our continued attention as well as joint efforts to de-escalate. At the same time, our continued and combined efforts are ever more needed to make progress on the political track towards a two-State solution.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, I would like to reiterate my delegation's confidence in the work of the team led by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, and to thank him for his presentation and for his valuable and tireless efforts.

The past six months have been dominated by massive violence, marked, on the one hand, by Palestinian-led revolts and uprisings, mainly from Gaza, and, on the other, by forces of repression of the Israeli border guards. A crucial event in this period was the Great March of Return, which began on 30 March and lasted until 15 May, during which more than a hundred Palestinians lost their lives and thousands more were injured. Noteworthy in that context of violence are the incendiary devices and missiles that were occasionally launched from the Gaza Strip, to which Israel has always responded with strong attacks.

A peaceful demonstration is a point of arrival on an open road, and not a point of departure. It appears after other means for finding solutions have been exhausted, during a prolonged period of time that has exceeded the limits for waiting, because the problems are stagnant or getting worse or because damage to property or people is imminent. In compliance with international humanitarian law, whenever a Palestinian demonstration is peaceful, it must be respected by Israel, which must not resort to measures of restraint that threaten the life, integrity and freedom of individuals. However, we would like to call on radical Islamist movements to refrain from any intention to coordinate Palestinian civilian marches, so as to avoid disproportionate adverse reactions, as Israel also has the right to guarantee the security of its citizens.

We urge the international community to endorse the arrangement already initiated by Egypt for sustainable intra-Palestinian reconciliation, which not only recognizes the Palestinian Authority as the sole legal representative of the Palestinians in the cause of the self-determination and recognition of Palestine as a State, but also ensures its return to and re-establishment in the Gaza Strip, in order to join efforts to reorganize the life of that populated enclave, especially in the area of security and the development of means of subsistence. In that regard, we applaud the presence of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which, despite its funding difficulties, continues to work to resolve the

humanitarian difficulties of Gaza and the Palestinian refugees in general.

As we said in our statement of 29 June, peace was the main premise on which the United Nations was created. It is for the maintenance of world peace and stability that the Security Council has been working over the nearly 73 years of the life of the Organization, and it is also for peace and stability that we must be cautious not to allow the Palestinian question to discredit the work that this important body has done for so long. We therefore urge the members of the Council, especially those with influence in the area, to find a formula that will bring the parties to the conflict back to the negotiating table, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions on the subject and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea believes that Palestine has the right to be recognized as a State, just as Israel has the right to live in peace and harmony in coexistence with Palestine and the other States of the region. In short, we believe in the two-State solution.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): At the outset, let me thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for, as always, a very comprehensive and insightful briefing.

I would also like to align myself with the statement of the European Union to be delivered later on in today's meeting.

Despite our constant calls for de-escalation in the Middle East, there has unfortunately not been any progress. On the contrary, we have failed to prevent further losses of life. The humanitarian situation of 2 million people in the Gaza Strip is even more desperate today than during our last debate, in April (see S/PV.8244). Limited access to basic services, including health care, chronic energy crises and lack of cooking gas and fuel can easily lead to the escalation of social tensions that may destabilize the situation in the region even further.

The ongoing protests at the Gaza border fence, fuelled by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, have led to violence, which affects both parties to the conflict. Recurring rocket attacks from Gaza towards Israel, as well as the launch of incendiary kites and balloons from the strip, aimed at nearby Israeli communities, are unacceptable and must stop.

We are also worried about the use of live ammunition by Israeli security forces, which have resulted in a high number of Palestinian casualties, including children, journalists and health workers. Thousands of people have been injured, which has put the Gaza health sector under further pressure. While recognizing the right of Israel to protect its borders and defend its legitimate security interests, we urge Israel to ensure the proportional use of force by its security services and to respect the fundamental right to peaceful protests. At the same time, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad have the responsibility to avoid provocations. Their actions represent a real threat with direct effects on Israel.

The danger of another war in Gaza is real. That is why we strongly urge all parties to de-escalate, exercise maximum restraint and prevent incidents that jeopardize the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis. Our main goal should be the resumption of a meaningful peace process. We continue to believe that only by returning to bilateral negotiations, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law, will it be possible to make a positive contribution to the process. That is the only path to a two-State solution and to resolving all final-status issues.

Establishing a political horizon, as well as an appropriate framework for political progress, will be possible only by working with our regional and international partners, starting with the Middle East Quartet. In that regard, we wish to underscore United States engagement and peace proposals, which could be helpful in reactivating the Middle East peace process. The constructive development of peaceful solutions would also require greater active involvement of some countries of the region. In that context, we especially thank Egypt for its important efforts in de-escalating the situation in Gaza.

At the regional level, the situation on the ground remains volatile. We share the Special Coordinator's opinion that we risk a regional spillover of the conflict, especially as the region already faces so many other challenges. We should do our utmost to prevent any further escalation and loss of life. In that context, Poland underlines the crucial role of the Security Council and the United Nations as a whole, as well as the key role played by Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov. Let me reiterate that we support a two-State solution under which the national aspirations of both parties to the conflict would be met, including the Palestinian right to self-determination and independence, as well as the

Israeli right to ensure its security and the normalization of relations with Arab States.

We closely follow developments with regard to the intra-Palestinian reconciliation and hope that the process will be successful. We therefore urge all Palestinian factions to work together to achieve a sustainable process that would allow the Palestinian Authority to resume its full responsibilities in Gaza. One single and legitimate Palestinian Authority could be an important step in securing the unity of a future Palestinian State and a basis for a sustainable peace agreement.

In conclusion, let me briefly touch on Lebanon and reaffirm our strong support for its territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence. The long-awaited parliamentary elections held on 6 May were conducted in a generally calm and peaceful atmosphere. We deem them to be very important and congratulate the Lebanese people. We support all efforts to strengthen Lebanon's long-standing tradition of democracy, freedom and diversity — a model for the whole region of the Middle East.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes today's quarterly debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and thanks Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his excellent briefing.

My delegation remains concerned about the deterioration of the security situation in the Middle East, where the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to capture the attention of the international community, following the new outbreak of violence in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel, which has claimed many lives. Côte d'Ivoire deplores the upsurge in violence, which threatens the lives of Israelis and Palestinians, exacerbates the humanitarian situation on the Gaza Strip and, above all, reduces the prospects for a political settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

Given the situation, my country calls on all parties to exercise restraint and welcomes the mediation efforts of Mr. Nickolay Mladenov. It also encourages the Egyptian Government to pursue its initiatives with a view to achieving a lasting ceasefire between Israelis and Palestinians. Furthermore, my delegation remains concerned about the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza, which has been gravely affected by the ongoing blockade and marked by youth unemployment and various water shortages and power outages. It therefore calls for the easing of the blockade on the Gaza Strip, including a lifting of restrictions on fuel imports needed to ensure the proper functioning of hospitals and basic social services.

My delegation also encourages Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to continue dialogue, in accordance with the reconciliation agreement signed by Hamas and Fatah in Cairo on 12 October 2017, with a view to enabling the effective return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza and humanitarian issues to be properly addressed. Côte d'Ivoire would like to reaffirm its principled position in favour of a negotiated political settlement to the conflict, based on a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In addition to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Middle East also continues to face a series of security challenges, such as the crises in Syria and Yemen and the Iranian nuclear issue. With regard to Syria, my delegation remains concerned about the fragile humanitarian situation and the deadlocked political process. On the humanitarian front, Côte d'Ivoire calls on the parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law in order to allow safe, sustainable and unhindered access for humanitarian aid to populations in distress. It welcomes the resumption of humanitarian assistance, in particular the decision by France and the Russian Federation to deliver humanitarian aid in eastern Ghouta.

On the political front, my country reiterates the urgent need for the resumption of a credible and inclusive political process on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) in order to restore stability and adopt a sustainable approach to addressing the effects of the humanitarian crisis in Syria. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the various initiatives aimed at relaunching the process of intra-Syrian dialogue and, within the framework of the Geneva process, encourages Mr. Staffan De Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to take the steps necessary to establish a committee tasked with drafting the new Syrian constitution, as decided at the Sochi meeting in Russia. It welcomes consultations held on 18 and 19 June in Geneva with the Special Envoy and representatives of the guarantor States of the Astana process, aimed at establishing the constitutional committee.

With regard to the crisis in Yemen, Côte d'Ivoire is deeply concerned about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, which the United Nations describes as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. It reiterates its principled position that there is no alternative to a political solution to the conflict. My delegation therefore calls on all parties to exercise restraint, to put an end to hostilities and to engage significantly on the road to achieving a political settlement to the crisis in order to overcome the political impasse in Yemen.

My delegation also welcomes the ongoing efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen to renew dialogue among the belligerents in the framework of a political settlement to the conflict in Yemen. Côte d'Ivoire calls on the international community to support the Special Envoy's efforts to bring the parties to make the compromises necessary for a sustainable way out of the crisis and to create the conditions for better humanitarian assistance to people in distress.

With regard to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, my delegation believes that the Iranian nuclear agreement is a strong guarantee for the implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and encourages all stakeholders to resolve their differences through negotiations within the Joint Commission stipulated in annex IV of the Plan of Action.

To conclude, Côte d'Ivoire calls on all parties involved in the crises in the Middle East to exercise restraint and favour dialogue as a means of resolving their differences in a sustainable way in order to create an environment conducive to peace and security in the region and in the world.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing and for his recent work with Egypt to secure a renewed ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. It is essential that the ceasefire be respected and maintained by all sides. The people of Israel and Gaza deserve peace and security.

The escalation seen at the Gaza perimeter last Friday, including the killing of an Israel Defence Forces soldier, is deeply concerning. Hamas must cease all acts of violence and terror and decide whether it is prepared to demonstrate its commitment to achieving peace and ending this conflict. The most recent escalation and exchange of rockets into southern Israel and the economic and kinetic response by the Israelis are also both concerning. We urge the parties to take immediate steps to reverse the current negative trends on the ground and commence renewed and meaningful peace negotiations.

Now more than ever, we urgently need a political process that delivers a two-State solution. As Council members, we must seize the opportunity presented by the prospect of a United States plan. The United Kingdom stands ready to support and contribute to all credible efforts to restart the peace process. We urge others to do the same. The United Kingdom position on the peace process is unchanged. We support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian Statem, with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

Every Israeli and Palestinian has the right to live in peace and security. No one wants to see a return to conflict, which will inevitably have devastating consequences. We call on the parties to take the following urgent actions to avoid escalating the conflict. First, Hamas must bring an immediate and permanent end to rocket fire and the sending of incendiary devices into Israel. Secondly, Israel must reverse its punitive measures and work with the international community to ease conditions in Gaza, including opening movement and access and reducing economic restrictions. Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority must resume salary payments and work to restore its presence in Gaza.

The international community also has responsibilities, including the need to rally around Special Coordinator Mladenov's plans to improve the situation in Gaza and in supporting Egyptian efforts on political reconciliation and longer-term arrangements for calm in Gaza.

The risk of tensions boiling over into a full-blown conflict are very real and very dangerous. Every effort must be made to avoid civilian casualties. Nobody around this table wants to see another Gaza conflict. At such a highly sensitive time, we urge calm and restraint. We appreciate Egyptian efforts in calming tensions, and we urge Egypt to do more by improving movement and access through the Rafah crossing.

We are also deeply concerned by continued demolition of Palestinian property by the Israeli authorities. Due to severe planning restrictions, many Palestinians have no option but to build without permission. That needs to change. Demolitions and evictions of Palestinians from their homes cause

unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians and in all but the most exceptional of cases are contrary to international humanitarian law.

The village of Khan Al-Ahmar is a case in point, an example that has also been raised this morning by the French and Dutch ambassadors. We continue to urge Israel to abandon demolition plans entirely and instead provide a transparent route to construction for Palestinians in Area C. Not only could demolition constitute forcible transfer, it will also pave the way for settlement building in E-1. In accordance with our long-standing policy, we would have to condemn such a move. Such action would strike a major blow to the prospects for a two-State solution and make it difficult to believe that Israel wants progress towards peace.

Finally, I want to reiterate that the United Kingdom remains firmly committed to supporting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and Palestinian refugees across the Middle East. The United Kingdom welcomes the important contributions that Member States are providing to UNRWA. However, the Agency's deficit remains at $217 million, meaning it will shortly have to make a decision about whether to open schools in September. The increased demand for UNRWA's services and growing instability across the region make support for UNRWA even more important. It is clear that UNRWA needs a broader pool of financial support from donors to achieve sufficient, assured and predictable financing. It is also clear that UNRWA needs to continue to promote realistic and technical cost-saving reforms.

The United Kingdom continues to support UNRWA and remains one of the top five donors. We have delivered our pledge of $37.5 million and have brought forward $13.5 million to help meet the urgent needs of Palestinian refugees. We encourage members of the Council to consider what more they can do to support Palestinian refugees and alleviate the current financial pressure facing UNRWA.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): I would like to express appreciation to Special Coordinator Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Here we are again, discussing the situation in Middle East and Palestine, but there does not seem to be reason for hope. The deteriorating political, humanitarian and security situation in Gaza remains extremely worrying. The escalation of violence in Gaza and southern Israel is deeply concerning, and we want to express our sorrow over the loss of lives, particularly children.

It is vitally urgent that all sides exercise maximum restraint, and everything must be done to de-escalate the tension in Gaza to avoid endangering the lives of innocent civilians and exacerbating the humanitarian situation. Further escalation of the situation will not help but will undermine ongoing efforts to improve the lives of Palestinians and support the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza.

Undoubtedly, the humanitarian situation cannot be alleviated unless essential services are fixed, including water, fuel, electricity and heath-care services, and the movement of people, goods and services is eased. We note the discussions that are under way, and we appreciate the continued engagement of the Special Coordinator with the Israeli and Palestinian sides and with regional and international partners to reduce tensions, support intra-Palestinian reconciliation and resolve all humanitarian challenges. The role of partners in scaling up their support is very important to help humanitarian agencies on the ground provide the necessary services to the people of Gaza, and we appreciate those who have done so.

The humanitarian situation will not be effectively addressed in the absence of any meaningful progress in the reconciliation process between Fatah and Hamas. That is why we continue to support the efforts of Egypt to restore control of the legitimate Palestinian Government in Gaza and commend its continued efforts to revive the process by holding talks with senior Hamas and Fatah officials.

Over the past few months, we have been preoccupied with the human tragedy in Gaza, but the situation in Gaza cannot be looked at in isolation. It is only by addressing the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions, that a lasting and durable solution can be found. Our position on that has always been consistent and clear. We fully support the goal of two States living side by side in peace and security as the only viable option. Unfortunately, the same known obstacles continue to work against any prospect for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and the prospect of a two-State solution seems to be an objective of which the possibility is receding.

In the meantime, it is our hope that all activities on both sides that will not help but continue to undermine the two-State solution as a viable option will cease. But here, of course, in light of the latest developments one finds it difficult to be hopeful about democratic possibilities providing a way out. We believe that everything must be done, no matter how unrealistic it may seem, to reverse the dangerous trajectory and help create a situation that supports the two sides in returning to direct and meaningful negotiations. The sooner that is done, the better it will be for Israelis and Palestinians alike, and indeed the whole region.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation thanks you, Sir, for organizing this important debate. I also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for the information he provided today, and in particular for his urgent efforts on behalf of the United Nations in Gaza.

My delegation associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

I wish to express our deep concern over the military action taken by the Government of Israel against the Palestinian population living in Gaza. According to a United Nations press report yesterday, Gaza Palestinians endure waves of violence that aggravate the extreme humanitarian crisis in which they already find themselves. Along the same lines, we regret the launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israeli civilian areas.

My delegation strongly rejects the air strikes by the Israeli occupying forces that took place on 13 and 14 July. We echo the statement made by the Palestinian representation in its letter of 17 July 2018, to the effect that it was Israel's largest campaign of daytime air strikes against the Palestinian inhabitants of that territory since its aggression of 2014, which claimed the lives of at least 2,200 Palestinians.

In a report published on 22 July, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs warned that the fuel supplies with which it has been precariously operating the health centres and hospitals of Gaza are predicted to run dry in August, that is, in just a few days. We welcome today's opening of the Kerem Shalom crossing, which in addition to allowing goods to cross the border, will allow 700,000 litres of fuel to enter Gaza with a view to powering electric equipment — such as incubators for premature babies and others — on which the lives of 2,000 hospital and health clinic patients depend. This opening will certainly attenuate the humanitarian crisis of the Palestinian people, who have lived for 11 years under a regime of collective punishment imposed by Israel, which denies them access to water and sanitation, increasing the risk of the spread of diseases of all kinds, and restricting their access to electricity with power outages of up to 20 hours a day.

Moreover, we must express our deep concern for the approval by the Knesset of the Jewish nation-State law, which is a colonial and discriminatory measure that could open the opportunity for that Government to expel and replace the Palestinian population through the imposition of ideological beliefs as official policies of that State, to the detriment of the rights of Palestinians to citizenship, property and land, language, culture and other rights recognized by international human rights law.

In that regard, we echo the statement made by the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, in its communiqué of 20 July, that this law denies the rights of the Palestinian people to live in their historic land, may give rise to colonial and racist practices, and constitutes an illegal instrument to annex the West Bank and seize the occupied Palestinian territories. We also associate ourselves with the statement concerning the nationality law, issued on 20 July by the United Nations Deputy Spokesman, Mr. Farhan Haq, who reaffirmed the respect of the United Nations for the sovereignty of States so long as they adhere to the universal principles of human rights, including the protection of minority rights.

I express the firm commitment of the delegation of Bolivia to all international efforts leading to a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian occupation, and in this regard we endorse such initiatives as the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and others that provide guarantees for a just and lasting peace allowing both peoples to live within recognized and secure borders.

I also express our appreciation to the Government of Egypt for its efforts to promote the process of intra-Palestinian reconciliation. The initiative was presented to the parties on 19 July with the aim of returning them to reconciliation talks as soon as possible and achieving

the consolidation of a Palestinian unity Government. Bolivia is convinced that the only long-term alternative to the occupation is the two-State solution, which will finally consolidate a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 international borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Sweden.

I want to thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing to the Council and for his tireless efforts on the ground.

We align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union later in this meeting.

A year and a half ago, in resolution 2334 (2016), the Council reaffirmed the steps needed to achieve a lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace. The Council demanded that both parties stop all activities impeding such progress. Since then, unfortunately, the situation has continued to deteriorate. Israeli settlement expansion has continued and there is an imminent risk of further violent escalation.

In Gaza in recent months, violence has killed over 152 Palestinians and injured more than 16,499, including many children. We have repeatedly demanded that any use of force must be proportionate. The firing of rockets and the launch of incendiary balloons and kites from Gaza into Israel by Hamas and other militant groups are absolutely unacceptable. We welcome the recent truce and the planned reopening of the Kerem Shalom crossing.

Efforts to achieve a lasting peace and an end to the occupation must be intensified. There is a humanitarian imperative to alleviate the suffering of the 2 million Gazans. Interventions with quick, direct and immediate impact on daily lives are urgently needed. This must be given utmost priority, while recognizing that the causes of the humanitarian crisis are political in their nature. We urge Israel to lift its closure regime, and we call for Palestinian reconciliation and the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. I will focus on three issues today — the important role of women in peace and security; children and the engagement of young people; and the negative developments on the ground.

First, with regard to women and peace and security, women are too often excluded globally from efforts to resolve conflicts, to the detriment of solid and sustainable peace. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is unfortunately no exception. That must change. A peace process cannot merely be about ending the occupation and the conflict. It must also be about building peaceful, vibrant, inclusive societies that are less susceptible to the threat of extremism. Empowering and including women and girls is an essential part of that. Through our extensive international development cooperation programme with Palestine, we will continue to work for enhanced political influence and the full enjoyment of human rights for women, young people and children. The same work is being done through dialogue with civil society and other actors in both Israel and Palestine.

Secondly, turning to young people and children, the conflict between Israel and Palestine has a negative effect on children on both sides. Many in the post-Oslo generation, both Israelis and Palestinians, have lost hope for the realization of a two-State solution. We need to show those young people that there is an alternative to violence and oppression. Last month the Council adopted resolution 2419 (2018), on youth, peace and security, which called for increasing the role of young people in negotiating and implementing peace agreements. The voices of young Israelis and Palestinians must be heard.

Ensuring a safe childhood for all children is essential to peaceful and prosperous societies. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which among other things secures the right to education for young Palestinians, plays a crucial role in that regard, not least in Gaza. It is now facing an unprecedented financial crisis, owing to a lack of contributions. We call on all donor countries to step up their efforts and meet their pledges, and we reiterate our call to other countries to contribute financially to UNRWA at this critical juncture. Sweden is UNRWA's third-largest contributor, and we remain committed to it. Ensuring the care, health, education and protection of children today is essential to laying the foundations for preventing further conflict in the future.

Finally, Israeli policy and actions in the occupied West Bank are severely undermining the possibility of a contiguous Palestinian State. They include the demolition of homes, and notably the imminent threat of the demolition of Khan Al-Ahmar and the

recent demolitions in Abu Nuwar and other places in Area C. Demolitions further increase the risk of forcible transfers of the Palestinian population, which are illegal under international law. They also include the current Israeli settlement policy, which continues despite the international community's repeated condemnations. We reiterate that settlements are a flagrant violation under international law. Israel's actions further include recent legislative changes and proposals and their implications, which raise concerns about the right to self-determination and non-discrimination. Lastly, they include economic hindrances, restrictions and limitations imposed on Palestine that make a viable Palestinian economy unattainable.

We must reinvigorate the efforts for a two-State solution based on international law, United Nations resolutions, previous agreements and well-known parameters, with Jerusalem as the future capital for two States and three religions. We must redouble our support for a contiguous Palestinian State, including the return of the Palestinian Government to Gaza, and we must act urgently together for the people of Gaza.

To sum up, a credible peace plan is urgently needed, and the two sides have to prepare for peace in a completely different way — in what they say, what they do and how women and young people are involved. Confidence between the parties must be built now. Both Israelis and Palestinians have to realize that either peace is gained together or both will lose. The situation in and around Gaza is untenable. Millions of people are caught between Hamas and other militant groups, on the one hand, and the crippling Israeli closure regime, on the other. Mediation has temporarily put a Band-Aid on the wound, but it will never heal unless there is a real solution. While that solution is being explored, urgent measures are needed to alleviate the humanitarian situation. We are working with all Council members to see how that can be achieved.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I would like to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. To that end, I want to take this opportunity to remind speakers that the presidency will use the flashing lights on the microphone collars in order to prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate them in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I want to inform everyone that we will be continuing the open debate right through the lunch hour, as we have a large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Mudallali (Lebanon): I would first like to congratulate Sweden on a very active and productive presidency of the Council this month. I would also like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

One of the world's brightest minds once said that peace can be achieved only by understanding. Regrettably, Israel's enactment last week of a new basic law struck the ultimate blow, driving us further away from understanding by enshrining in law a policy of discrimination by the Israeli authorities against Arabs, especially Palestinians. The law drew widespread condemnation in the Arab and Muslim worlds, from the Palestinians to the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, as well as Israelis and Israeli-Arab lawmakers. The new law is seen as foreclosing the future of the peace process and of the concepts of a two-State solution and land for peace, and rendering them dead on at least three of the final status issues — Jerusalem, the settlements and self-determination. The law therefore contravenes the dozens of United Nations resolutions that address the question of Palestine and form the basis for any lasting and just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. If international law and international legality are tossed aside, what is the future of peace in the Middle East?

My fear is that we will be eternally condemned to the same cycle of violence and to perpetual wars. Look at Gaza. After so many wars and military operations by the Israelis, and after thousands of casualties, we may be facing another new conflict today. Gaza continues to suffocate under unimaginably difficult humanitarian conditions. The situation for its residents is beyond desperation, and the cuts in the funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) will not help ease their plight. For more than seven decades, UNRWA's vital work in Jordan, Syria and my own country as well as in Gaza has helped millions of Palestinian refugees, keeping them from burying their last ounces of hope six feet under. It acts as a stabilizer in our region. The UNRWA pledging conference last month in New York and the Extraordinary Ministerial Conference held in

Rome on 15 March were successful in demonstrating support for the Agency. We must now build on that momentum in order to meet the deficit of an agency that no one can afford to let die.

In Lebanon, a country that embraces diversity, we are in the process of forming a new Government after completing successful parliamentary elections in May. They were held according to a new electoral law, with participation by the diaspora for the first time, and several international observers commended the Lebanese authorities for the transparency with which they were conducted. A new Lebanese Government is in the making. Naturally, among its key priorities will be to start implementing the recommendations of the Conférence économique pour le développement, par les réformes et avec les entreprises, held in Paris, and enacting the relevant structural reforms in order to help boost our economy. Another ongoing challenge will be addressing the issue of displaced Syrians in Lebanon so as to arrange for their safe return. However, that must not wait until a political solution materializes in Syria.

A few weeks from now, the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) will be up for renewal. We count on Council members to acknowledge the efforts of UNIFIL by ensuring a smooth renewal of its mandate. My country firmly believes that UNIFIL remains instrumental to preserving peace and security in southern Lebanon and thereby contributing to our stability. The latest report of the Secretary-General on the subject (S/2018/703) testifies to that role. It is instrumental despite — and because of — Israel's continuing daily violations of Lebanon's sovereignty. Daily Israeli violations, especially airspace violations, continue unabated; the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the issue noted 456 air violations during the reporting period. We call on the Security Council to use its authority to insist that Israel respect and implement resolution 1701 (2006) by withdrawing from the occupied Lebanese territory and ending its continuing violations of our sovereignty.

Progress also needs to be made in order to resolve the remaining border disputes, including the maritime one. In this regard, allow me to recall once again my Government's initiative to seek the Secretary-General's good offices to that end.

We continue to view the tripartite mechanism as a useful tool for reducing tensions, resolving disputes and achieving the goal of a permanent ceasefire in the south.

In conclusion, I wish to welcome the appointment by the Secretary-General of the new Commander of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Major General Stefano Del Col, to whom we express our full confidence. We wish him the best of luck in his new mission. We also pay tribute to the excellent work carried out by the outgoing UNIFIL Commander, Major General Michael Beary.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Mr. President, I should like to thank you for having invited us to participate in this open debate on an issue that the Council has long been discussing but whose importance has not diminished.

I shall deliver an abbreviated version of my statement, the full text of which will be provided to the Secretariat.

Argentina firmly supports all efforts aimed at achieving peace and stability in the Middle East. It is imperative that all parties play a constructive role, including regional actors and the major Powers, so as to move towards a resolution of differences through negotiations. Argentina calls on the parties to refrain from unilateral and provocative actions and condemns all incitement to violence, religious intolerance and racism.

With regard to the question of Palestine, Argentina wishes to reaffirm its support for a peaceful, definitive and comprehensive settlement on the basis of the two-State solution and the 1967 borders as well as the decisions reached by the parties during the negotiation process, as set out in the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Argentina reaffirms the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to an independent, viable State recognized by all nations, as well as the right of the State of Israel to live in peace alongside its neighbours within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Argentina also reiterates its concern at the persistent and continued growth of illegal Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory and

urges that their expansion be halted. The settlements run counter to international law, are an obstacle to peace and undermine prospects for the solution of two States living in peace and security, thus perpetuating an unsustainable status quo. At the same time, we strongly condemn the actions carried out by Hamas against Israel, including the launching of rockets and incendiary devices from the Gaza Strip, which must end immediately.

Palestinian leaders must address Israeli security concerns in a spirit of sincerity, and we urge Israel, in cases where it exercises its inalienable right to legitimate defence, to take into account its obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, refraining from any actions that would make resumption of dialogue more difficult. In this regard, Argentina notes with concern the continuing excessive use of force by the military and condemns acts of settler violence.

Argentina reaffirms the special status of Jerusalem pursuant to the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and in this regard rejects any unilateral attempt to modify it. Argentina believes that the holy city must be a place of meeting and peace and that it must guarantee Jews, Muslims and Christians free access to holy sites. Any attempt to deny or diminish the profound meaning of those sites or their historical ties to the three great monotheistic religions would be totally unacceptable and only stand in the way of finding a solution to the conflict.

Concerning the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, Argentina supports the reaching of a political solution through dialogue and diplomacy, in compliance with international law and with full respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Argentina attaches particular importance to the Geneva talks held under the auspices of Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria. We therefore have renewed hope that tangible results can be achieved that will result in a Syrian solution to Syrian problems, in keeping with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015).

Argentina firmly condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and emphatically rejects the terrorist acts carried out by the so-called Islamic State as well as by the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups recognized as such by the Security Council. Our country also reaffirms its conviction that the combat against terrorism must be waged within the framework of international law, with full respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

To conclude, allow me to reaffirm that diplomacy and dialogue are the only path to peace in the Middle East. The Council must spare no effort to urge the parties to move in this direction, based at all times on the parameters recognized by the international community in keeping with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, allow me at the outset to commend the active Swedish presidency of the Security Council for this month and to express my country's appreciation for your efforts to ensure a positive outcome in the work of the Council.

The world recently celebrated the life of a man who was able to speak to the human conscience. He spent many years of his life fighting from behind bars against apartheid, and he spent his years of freedom advocating for a culture of peace, freedom and tolerance. On 18 July we celebrated the centennial of the birth of Nelson Mandela, who dreamed of freedom and equality. The Palestinian question was a large part of his struggle for freedom, and indeed he is the one who said:

> "We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians".

This is the dream of millions of Palestinians, including the thousands who are prisoners or detainees.

In return, Israel daily makes clear, through the attacks and deliberate killings it carries out, that it considers itself a State above the law. For Israel, siege, starvation, the construction of barriers and apartheid walls were not enough; it has recently adopted an abhorrent racial law, namely, the Nation State of the Jewish People, which paves the way for practices of genocide in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. The Palestinian people are therefore in dire need of international protection, as set out by the General Assembly in its resolution ES-10-20, of 13 June 2018.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia strongly condemns the continued Israeli violations and stresses its rejection of all illegal Israeli policies, practices and plans, along with Israel's attempts to entrench apartheid and dissipate the national identity of the Palestinian people.

My country stresses the importance of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, as it is a strategic option to bring the Arab-Israeli conflict to an end on the basis of the agreed international parameters and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, based on the establishment of a State of Palestine within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and on ending the Israeli occupation of all Arab occupied territories, including the Syrian Arab Golan and the Lebanese occupied land.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) suffers from an acute shortage in its financial and humanitarian resources that could result in millions of Palestinian refugees being denied their basic right to education and a decent life. The Palestinian question has always been and always will be championed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as its first cause.

For that reason, my country has provided UNRWA with an urgently needed $50 million, as announced by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques at the Jerusalem summit held in Dhahran City. We have disbursed more than $100 million over the past year alone. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia firmly believes in action, not in words. Accordingly, over the past two decades my country's total financial support to UNRWA has amounted to nearly $1 billion — with a "B" — and more than $6 billion — with a "B" as well — to the Palestinian people in the form of humanitarian, development and relief aid.

Syria was a land of civilization and a beacon of science before it came under the control of a dictatorial regime to which civilization means nothing. Its barrel bombs have destroyed the remnants of that civilization, which are thousands of years old. Its rockets have levelled the minarets of mosques and the domes of churches. Its soldiers and sectarian gangs have silenced the voice of the rebellious people. The regime has claimed the lives of men, women and the elderly, declaring victory over its own people. It is shameful that this regime has failed to clear its territory of occupation but brags about destroying Dara'a and Ghouta while displacing their people.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stresses once again that the misery of the Syrian people should end. A peaceful solution must be pursued based on the principles of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015). Protection should be provided to civilians in Syria. Humanitarian aid must be delivered to those in need throughout Syria. We call for the immediate release of abductees and detainees, the disclosure of the fate of missing people, and assistance to the return of internally displaced persons and refugees.

My country supports the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Martin Griffiths. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its brotherly countries in the coalition have exercised the utmost restraint to restore legitimacy in Yemen, especially with regard to Al-Hudaydah. However, Houthi militias supported by Iran ignore every political initiative and fail to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2216 (2015). The continued Houthi control of parts of Yemen has spawned the medical, food and humanitarian disasters. Saving Yemen and its people requires removing Al-Hudaydah, its port and other Yemeni cities from Houthi control, thereby enabling an increased level of humanitarian assistance, and liberating them from Houthi pillaging.

The militias that staged a coup in Yemen have launched 163 Iranian missiles at cities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Independent reports by the United Nations have made it clear that they came from Iran. They were manufactured in Iran and transferred to the Houthis from Iran. In that regard, the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/602) on the implementation of resolution 2231 (2015), issued on 12 June, states in paragraph 10, related to the missiles launched at my country, that the debris of five of those missiles share key design features with a known type of missile manufactured by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Iranian regime continues to use all its financial, scientific, and military resources to spread havoc and destabilization in the Middle East, a region that has suffered and continues to suffer from the destabilization situation engendered by the Khomeini revolution in Iran in 1979. The main principle of the revolution is to export its extremist ideology not only to neighbouring countries, but beyond. We occasionally receive reports of the involvement of Iran and its agents in destabilization activities, as well as of repeated attacks on diplomatic headquarters in Iran, with complete disregard for the relevant international agreements and instruments.

It is high time for the Security Council to reject Iran's irresponsible behaviour and continued intervention in

the internal affairs of other countries in the region, as well as the spread of sedition and sectarianism. The Council must tell to Iran that enough is enough so as to prevent terrorism and violence from increasing in the region and to enable the Iranian and Arab peoples in the Arab Gulf region and the Middle East to enjoy security, peace and stability.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Paksitan): My delegation thanks the Swedish presidency for convening this open debate and expresses its appreciation for the comprehensive briefing by Special Coordinator for the Middle East Nickolay Mladenov.

The tide of turmoil and conflict in the Middle East, far from receding, has continued to rise, with even greater unpredictability. As a consequence, millions of people are having to endure unimaginable suffering, caught up in a vortex of violence driven by the actions of the occupying Power, as well as the divergent interests and priorities of regional and external Powers. The Special Coordinator has presented a deeply troubling assessment of the situation in the region, especially in the occupied Palestinian territories. The facts speak for themselves. Gaza has been dealt another blow by the Israeli bombardment, thereby resulting in the further loss of precious lives. In the wake of the recent escalation, some have called for all sides to exercise restraint and step back from the brink of renewed conflict. As much as any resort to violence is unacceptable, the Palestinian issue is in essence a struggle between an occupied people and an occupying Power. Obfuscating that incontrovertible reality would be tantamount to drawing a moral equivalence between the acts of the aggressor and the aggrieved. That is not unacceptable.

The long-suffering Palestinian people continue to face well-entrenched and systematic violations of their fundamental human rights at the hands of the Israeli occupation. Addressing the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein spoke at length of the endemic and multi-faceted challenges confronting the daily lives of the Palestinian people. If there ever was a need to lend credibility to those words, the so-called Jewish nation-State law, passed by the Israeli Parliament on 19 July, provides a vivid manifestation of the legally enshrined policy of discrimination by Israel. By ascribing privilege purely on religious grounds, that basic law relegates the indigenous Arab population to second-class citizens.

Such racist laws should have no place in today's world. Historical facts cannot be re-written by legislative fiat. We reject any attempts to diminish the legal standing of the Palestinians or to deprive them of their legitimate rights within their homeland. The international community cannot continue to avoid its responsibility to promote a just solution to the problem. The Security Council cannot continue to avoid its obligations under resolution 242 (1967) and at least 80 successor resolutions to enforce a just solution to the conflict, which is at the core of the challenges that confront the Middle East today.

The plight of the Palestinian people has reverberated across this Chamber for as long as the United Nations has existed, but sadly no end to their suffering seems to be in sight. In recent days, the Security Council's inaction with regard to Palestine has led to a more proactive role by the General Assembly to fill the void. resolution ES-10/20, overwhelmingly adopted by the General Assembly at its emergency special session on 13 June, therefore was a call to action for the Secretary-General to ensure the protection of the Palestinian civilian population. We look forward to the Secretary-General's report outlining concrete and practical steps to alleviate the pain and suffering of the people of Palestine.

The Middle East stands at a dangerous crossroads. As existing conflicts have intensified and new threats have emerged, the imperative for diplomatic solutions is more urgent than ever. As Iraq and Lebanon consolidate their democratic gains as a result of recently held parliamentary elections, we commend them for turning a new page in their national quest for inclusive and representative political participation.

My country will continue to lend its support for negotiated settlements in other regional situations, including Syria and Yemen, based on agreed frameworks and through inclusive political engagement.

It will not be easy to restore peace and stability to the Middle East. Beyond the diplomacy and the genuine commitment by all Powers and parties to negotiated solutions, a comprehensive and enlightened policy is needed to address and overcome the underlying political, economic and social causes of these conflicts.

Such a comprehensive policy and bold diplomacy, especially by those who wield power and influence with the principal parties, is essential if we are to defy the dire predictions of disaster in the Middle East that abound today.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate. I also align myself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The occupation of Palestine is the main root cause of the conflicts in the Middle East. Consequently, Israel must be compelled to end the occupation, to stop its expansionist strategies and to put an end to all its aggressive policies and criminal practices. That is the only way to ensure a viable permanent solution to the Middle East conflict, thereby restoring the inalienable rights of the Palestinians.

Since the Council's last quarterly meeting on this item (see S/PV.8244), the Israeli regime, confident due to the unequivocal support of the United States and emboldened by the Council's inaction, has intensified its brutalities and illegal activities. So far, it has killed more than 140 peaceful Palestinian protestors and injured around 17,000 others. That includes killing and injuring more than 1,300 women and girls, as well as more than 3,100 children.

However, even those vast systematic atrocities did not satisfy the Israeli Education Minister, who insisted that "Israeli warplanes should drop bombs over the heads of Gazan children". In his radically extremist view, there is no legal impediment to shooting directly at children. Israel has also continued striking the civilian infrastructure of the Gaza Strip and placed new restrictions on the only cargo crossing the border. That will drastically deteriorate the already grave humanitarian situation caused by the illegal and inhumane blockade imposed there by Israel for more than a decade.

Similarly, the regime has also continued the establishment of illegal settlements. The latest official data reveals that in the West Bank, 99.7 per cent of Israeli public land grants go to settlers. Another example is the Israeli plan to demolish the village of Khan Al-Ahmar, expel its original Palestinian inhabitants and replace them with illegal Israeli settlement units and settlers.

However, one of the worst developments is the enactment by Israel of its so-called basic law, which declares that only Jews have the right of self-determination. It also strips Arabic of its designation as one of the official languages. In practice, that means Jewish supremacy over others; it means that others who have been treated as second-class citizens for far too long are now, legally, second-class citizens. It also means racism, apartheid and the legalization of such racism and apartheid. Ultimately, it means legitimizing exclusion, segregation and systemic inequality.

The law runs counter to the 1963 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, according to which

> "any doctrine of racial differentiation or superiority is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous" (*General Assembly resolution 1904 (XVIII), fifth preambular para.*).

We recall General Assembly resolution 3379 (XXX) of 1975, in which the Assembly determined that "zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination". Unfortunately, in 1991, when Israel had made its participation in the Madrid Conference conditional on the revocation of resolution 3379 (XXX), the Assembly decided to revoke that resolution.

Now, nearly 30 years after of the revocation of that resolution, it is crystal clear that by doing so, the General Assembly only emboldened Israel to legalize racism. The enactment of this law once again proves that racism is in the very nature of the Israeli regime. Therefore, the General Assembly should not permit itself to be deceived and blackmailed by Israeli rhetoric and victim-playing. The adoption of this racist law has to be condemned in the strongest possible terms. Israel should be compelled to revoke it, as it runs counter to the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the basic principles of international human rights law.

Moreover, the recognition of Al-Quds Al-Sharif by a certain State as the Israeli capital gravely contravenes international law and relevant resolutions of the Council and the Assembly. The international community should fulfil its responsibility in rejecting it, as its aim is to legalize the occupation and to deprive Palestinian of all of their inalienable rights, including their inherent right to self-determination and to return to their homeland to

establish their own independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

In conclusion, I hesitate to respond to the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia. It is very sad for Iran to see Saudis aligned with Israeli representatives in accusing Iran of sponsoring terrorism. It is very sad for our region. I would like to refer to the allegations made by the Israeli and Saudi delegations against my country. I reject them all and do not want to dignify any of them with a response. The aim of such allegations is to distract global attention from the atrocities they continue to commit in Palestine and in Yemen. It is in their common interest to make such allegations. Nevertheless, no amount of smear campaigning can cover up their atrocities. They must be held accountable for all of their crimes in killing women and children in Yemen and in Palestine.

The President: I remind colleagues about the four-minute rule.

I now give the floor to the representative of Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Moncada (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take the floor, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, during this quarterly open debate on a topic to which we have historically attached special importance — the situation of the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

First of all, the Movement takes this opportunity to once again reaffirm its permanent solidarity with the Palestinian people and its unwavering support for their just cause, particularly in the current context, where the situation on the ground in occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, is dire and clearly unsustainable, considering the tragic developments of the past few months. Among them, the most recent episode of violence occurred only 10 days ago in Gaza, which points to the triggering of a new war. In this regard, the States members of the Movement reaffirm once again that the continuing Israeli occupation and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a whole continue to threaten international peace and security, and therefore require urgent action for a solution in accordance with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and, of course, the Charter of the United Nations.

Furthermore, the Security Council must comply with its obligations under the Charter and act accordingly to uphold its resolutions, which not only constitute the basis for a just and lasting peaceful settlement but are also legally binding on all States Members of the United Nations. In this regard, we express our readiness to contribute to the achievement of a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflict and call for the undertaking and intensification of all international and regional efforts necessary to support this objective, the fundamental purpose of which is to put an end to this injustice and to promote a just and lasting solution. Let us be clear — the only way to achieve this goal is through peaceful means based on the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 border, with a view to establishing a sovereign and independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Movement continues to consider that resolution 2334 (2016) offers the most viable path to peace by setting out the fundamental requirements and parameters for a just settlement that would preserve the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and respect the long-standing terms of reference adopted by the international community under the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. Likewise, resolution 2334 (2016) guarantees the fulfilment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination and independence in their State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We therefore call for the full and effective implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), in particular by the occupying Power.

Similarly, the States of the Movement continue to fight for the full respect and implementation of all other relevant resolutions on this issue, for only in this way will the necessary conditions be created to put an end to the occupation, justly resolve the conflict in all its aspects and make Palestinian-Israeli peace and security a reality for the benefit of both peoples, of the region and of the international community as a whole. It is therefore imperative to take immediate action to remedy the situation on the ground, reduce tensions and foster an environment conducive to the search for peace.

We also take this opportunity to express our deep regret at the recent veto by the United States delegation to this organ of draft resolution S/2018/516, submitted last month by the delegation of the State of Kuwait (see S/PV.8274), which sought to address the recent

escalation of violence and the urgent need for the protection of the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory and in particular in the Gaza Strip. We therefore express our concern about the inability of the Security Council to fulfil its mandate on this important issue due to the special interests of one of its permanent members.

With regard to Gaza, the situation there — in particular, the grave humanitarian situation that unfortunately continues to deteriorate as the days go by — continues to cause great concern to the Movement. In this regard, we reiterate the call for the total lifting of the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip, which continues to subject more than 2 million Palestinian children, women and men to indescribable suffering. It is necessary to stress once again that the crisis in Gaza must be addressed in a comprehensive manner and in accordance with international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law, as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions and in the context of a general situation caused by the prolongation of Israel's illegal and belligerent foreign occupation and the unequivocal calls to put an end to this occupation that has been going on for more than half a century.

Moreover, and bearing in mind that Israel has clearly renounced its obligations to protect the Palestinian civilian population as the occupying Power, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Movement calls upon the international community to guarantee the protection of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip and in all the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in order to address the serious insecurity situation of the occupied population and prevent the loss of more innocent lives. Along these lines, we reiterate our deep concern because no responsibility is attributed by Israel for all the violations committed, which promotes impunity and further destabilizes the situation on the ground. At the same time, it diminishes the prospects for peace. Accordingly, we call for international action, in particular by the Security Council, to demand accountability and the cessation of the violations committed by the occupying Power. Israel must comply with its obligations in the framework of international law.

In addition, the Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, such as the illegal decision dated 14 December 1981, which sought to modify the legal, physical and demographic status and institutional structure of the Syrian Golan, as well as Israeli measures seeking to assert Israel's jurisdiction and administration in this area, are null and void and have no legal effect. In this regard, and in accordance with the principled position of the Movement, we demand once again that Israel comply with the provisions of resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the pre-June 1967 borders, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In conclusion, the Movement reaffirms its enduring solidarity with the Palestinian people and its unwavering support for its just cause, and at the same time its commitment to further strengthening and coordinating international efforts aimed at promoting a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including the suffering of Palestinian refugees, on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). We also reaffirm our strong commitment to continuing to support the heroic Palestinian people in their efforts to achieve justice and the realization of their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations, including the right to self-determination, freedom and independence in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Israel, the occupying Power, has reiterated its close relationship with armed terrorist groups. This fact was proved by its targeting today of a Syrian Arab Army warplane over the rural area of western Dara'a and Quneitra, which was bombarding the strongholds of the gangs of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant on the periphery of the Yarmouk valley. This close relationship has also been proved by the Syrian Arab Army's discovery of Israeli military equipment in these hideouts.

The Security Council decided more than 15 years ago to discuss the situation in the Middle East, and holds quarterly general debates on the topic in recognition of the importance of this situation in the hope that the relevant Council resolutions requiring Israel to end its occupation of the occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Arab Golan, by withdrawing to the borders of 4 June 1967, will be implemented. However, all of these efforts have been fruitless because of Israel's refusal to comply with Security Council resolutions and owing to the policies adopted by some members of the

Council to provide Israel with the political protection and cover that allow it to maintain its occupation of Arab territories in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, notwithstanding the fact that more than 51 years have elapsed since the occupation started.

The policies of these States have contributed to the transformation of Palestine into an open collective prison and facilitated Israel's application of racial policies of apartheid against Palestinians, the legitimate owners of land in Jerusalem and other occupied territories. These States have supported Israel's expansion of cancerous settlements, which undermines any possibility for the establishment of a desired Palestinian State. In addition, those States insist on not addressing the current developments in Palestine within their broad real context. They attempt to portray the situation as mutual violence that must be de-escalated, and are oblivious to the root causes of the conflict, namely, occupation, settlement-building, population displacement and other practices of the Israeli occupation, not to mention the attempts of some to promote sinister deals that would strip Palestinians of their legitimate rights.

My country, Syria, condemns in the strongest terms the Hebrew-Jewish nation-State law, which has been enacted by the Knesset of the usurper Israeli entity and entrenches that racist entity. We call on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities and thwart this law, which runs counter to all the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and does not protect the inalienable and historic rights of the Palestinian people to restore their territory, including the right to return.

Along the same lines of the aforementioned barbaric Israeli policy, Israel has occupied the Syrian Golan since 1967, thereby keeping Syrians under the yoke of abominable occupation. It is a bitter situation that cannot be overlooked as Israel continues its occupation and the colonial settlement-building in the Golan, not to mention its policies of repression and racial discrimination. Israel plunders the Golan's natural resources and arbitrarily detains Syrians in Israeli prisons, in violation of the Geneva Conventions. By way of example, Sudqi Almaqt, the Syrian Mandela, was detained by Israeli authorities because he had video and audio recordings of Israeli occupation forces cooperating in the Syrian occupied Golan with gangs related to Da'esh and Al-Nusra Front in the disengagement of forces zone in the Golan.

We have always informed the Security Council and United Nations organs of Israel's unlimited support to terrorist armed groups in the disengagement zone, including repeated direct military aggression by Israel against Syrian territories in support of these groups. It is a flagrant violation of the disengagement agreement and of international law, on which the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Special Coordinator are suspiciously silent. Israel has falsely alleged that it has no connection to the war in Syria. However, Israel, together with the Governments of some States, has smuggled hundreds of members of the terrorist White Helmets organization and leaders of other armed organizations. This proves that Israel and those States support terrorist groups in their aggression against Syria and the destruction of Syrian infrastructure under false pretexts. Israel has facilitated the infiltration of terrorists into Israel and Jordan, and thence to the States that sponsored them, and provided them with the means to destroy Syria and tarnish its image.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its sovereign right over the occupied Syrian Golan within the 4 June 1967 borders, which is non-negotiable and does not fall under a statute of limitations. Our occupied land and usurped rights should be restored to us as the legitimate owners. Israeli settlers must leave our land in the Golan sooner or later.

In conclusion, the Syrian Government calls on the Security Council to take all immediate measures necessary to compel Israel to stop its aggression and violations, end the occupation of Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan, withdraw to the 4 June 1967 borders, according to the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981), and facilitate the establishment of a Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

I will not respond to the statement made by the representative of the Bani Saud regime, which is the exclusive representative of the terrorist and takfiri Wahhabi ideology. This regime inspires terrorist ideologies all over the world, including those of Al-Qaida, Da'esh, Boko Haram and others. This terrorist Wahhabi regime is responsible for all of the bloodshed and lives claimed by terrorists, whom it has supported in Syria and elsewhere, while it continues in each meeting to distract us from our objectives in order to serve Israel, its partner in international terrorism.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Sætre (Norway): Norway is deeply concerned about recent developments in the Middle East, in particular in Syria, Yemen and Gaza. As a first step, it is crucial to ease tensions and avoid a further escalation of violence in the region. Norway supports United Nations Special Envoys De Mistura, Griffiths and Salamé and Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Mladenov in their efforts to overcome political deadlocks and to include all parties in credible political processes.

In Syria, victories on the battlefield cannot replace a political solution. Norway urges all parties involved to engage in good faith in the formation and subsequent work of the constitutional committee. Meanwhile, we welcome the emerging consensus in support of restoring stability in the Golan Heights, on the basis of resolution 338 (1973) and the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. Norway remains deeply concerned about the situation in Yemen. After more than three years of conflict, Yemen is experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Norway's humanitarian support totals approximately $34 million, including our contribution through the Central Emergency Response Fund. It is imperative that the United Nations receive full support from all stakeholders.

Our long-standing engagement in the efforts to resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestine is based on our firm support for a negotiated two-State solution. Durable peace will not be possible before all final-status issues are resolved. Economic development and institution-building are important steps but can never substitute for a political solution. Therefore, Norway reiterates its call for the resumption of a meaningful political process.

Together with the United Nations, the European Union (EU) and Egypt, as the chair of the International Donor Group for Palestine, Norway has intensified efforts to address the precarious humanitarian situation in Gaza. Key priorities are increased water and energy distribution and improved access, job creation and the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza. Our goal is to assist the 2 million people living in Gaza and enable the Palestinian Authority to regain full control. The political division between Gaza and the West Bank must end. Gaza is an integral part of Palestine and of a future Palestinian State. We commend Egypt on its mediation efforts to address all outstanding issues, including access, movement and security. To make further progress, all Palestinian factions must end provocative and violent activities. The closure regime must be eased and the dual-use list revised.

Donors must remain committed to alleviating the situation on the ground and to providing continued assistance to the Palestinian people. Norway hosted an informal meeting with the Palestinian Authority, the United Nations, the EU and the World Bank in Oslo on 18 July. It was followed by a meeting for all donors in Ramallah on 23 July, where the Palestinian Authority and those present at the Oslo meeting presented current plans and donor activities. Progress in Gaza is our priority leading up to the ministerial meeting of the International Donor Group for Palestine, to be held on 27 September in New York.

The nuclear agreement with Iran, which was endorsed unanimously by the Security Council, has helped promote regional stability and has been effective in achieving its objective — to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. We therefore regret President Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and to reimpose United States nuclear sanctions. We strongly urge Iran and the remaining signatories to uphold the deal and continue fulfilling their obligations. Norway supports the EU's active engagement in the efforts to ensure continued implementation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Kawamura (Japan): I thank the presidency for convening this debate. I would also like to thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

Continued instability in the Middle East region is of great concern. Violence in Gaza remains intense, and, as the Secretary-General has pointed out, we are at the brink of another devastating conflict. We urge all sides to exercise maximum restraint. Once again, we stress that violence cannot bring about a solution and that what is needed in the region is a surge in diplomacy. In that regard, we commend international efforts to bring about a ceasefire on the ground in Gaza.

Japan is also paying close attention to recent steps being made in the Egyptian-led reconciliation process. We hope those efforts will lead to the de-escalation of the tension in Gaza.

The United Nations has played a central role in the region with its numerous tools for peace: mediation, good offices, humanitarian assistance, support for early recovery and the enhancement of social resilience, among others. Japan believes in the roles and effectiveness of the United Nations. We will continue to support its diplomatic efforts in the region.

As for the Middle East peace process, the United Nations — inter alia, the Security Council — has built the base for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace through its resolutions over its history. Japan will continue with its confidence-building efforts to assist the parties in implementing those resolutions. We believe in the realization of a two-State solution in line with relevant Security Council resolutions and known parameters. We also emphasize the United Nations essential role in addressing humanitarian situations. We thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing on his ongoing efforts in implementing projects for those in need in Gaza. We will continue extending our support to the Palestinian people, in close coordination with the United Nations.

Allow me to briefly touch upon the situation in Syria. Japan has been supporting the United Nations efforts in implementing Security Council resolutions and extending assistance to people in need. After seven years of devastating war, we want to believe the Special Envoy's recent words in the Council Chamber that we are moving cautiously in the right direction on the political front. While Japan will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to alleviate people's suffering, we are ready, if necessary, to step up our engagement towards a political solution.

Let me close as I opened, by reiterating the importance of diplomatic solutions and the continued role of the United Nations in achieving them. That simple but critical message can be applied to the situation not only in Palestine and Syria, but also Yemen, Libya and elsewhere. Japan always supports diplomatic solutions based on relevant Security Council resolutions.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Ms. Adamson: The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Liechtenstein align themselves with this statement.

The situation in the Middle East continues to deteriorate. The Gaza Strip has been like a pressure cooker for some time and is on the verge of explosion. Two million people have limited access to basic services and shrinking hopes that their own lives and the lives of their children can be improved. That is the backdrop to tensions, which have escalated in past months.

Since the end of March, we have seen protests and violence at the Gaza border fence. Continued provocation and unacceptable violent actions by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad represent a real and concerning threat, with communities in southern Israel paying the consequences. In past weeks, we have seen multiple rockets fired from Gaza towards Israel, followed by Israeli air strikes on targets in Gaza. The incendiary kites and balloons that have been launched from Gaza for over a hundred days must stop.

The response by Israeli security forces, often using live ammunition, resulted in over 135 Palestinian fatalities, including minors, journalists and a health worker. More than 14,000 were injured, which put a massive strain on the Gaza health sector. The European Union (EU) urged Israel to refrain from the excessive use of force against unarmed civilians when protecting its legitimate security interests. The use of force must be proportionate at all times. Equally, Israel should reverse its punitive measures and work with the international community to ease conditions in Gaza, including opening movement and access for all humanitarian actors.

In order to prevent further escalation of violence, we strongly urge all relevant parties to respect international law, de-escalate tensions, exercise restraint and prevent incidents that could jeopardize the lives of Palestinians and Israelis.

We welcome the truce and the planned reopening of the Kerem Shalom crossing. The EU fully supports the efforts by Special Coordinator Mladenov, in close relation with the Palestinian Authority, to enhance United Nations capacity in Gaza to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and reduce tensions.

But to prevent the crisis from worsening, further action is needed. Five steps are urgent and necessary. While addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns, the EU calls for an end of the closure and a full opening of the crossing points in order to reinvigorate the Gazan economy. The international community should continue to support the Special Coordinator's proposals to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Current efforts under Egyptian auspices to reunite Gaza and the

West Bank under one single and legitimate Palestinian Authority through progress in the intra-Palestinian reconciliation must also be supported by the international community.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East must remain able to carry out its important function and services with the international community stepping up its support and its financial commitment to plug the funding gap. Finally, serious efforts must be made towards a resumption of meaningful negotiations aimed at a two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders, that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation and resolves all final status issues in order to end the conflict.

The EU stands ready to contribute to those efforts. Our intention is to continue to work with our partners, the Israelis and the Palestinians; with regional actors, such as Jordan and Egypt; and with our partners within the Middle East Quartet to that end.

The EU is committed to ensuring that all its instruments continue to best serve its policies. That is why it has launched a review of the modalities for the EU engagement on the ground, to make sure that all the financial support and other policy activities of the EU have an impact in the achievement of the political goal of the two States without reducing the level of funding.

Beyond Gaza, we cannot ignore the continued demolition of Palestinian property by the Israeli authorities. As High Representative Mogherini made clear last week, those issues have our full attention, in particular the pending demolition of the Palestinian village of Khan Al-Ahmar located in a sensitive location in Area C. Its demolition and displacement would severely threaten the viability of the two-State solution and undermine prospects for peace. The EU expects the Israeli authorities to reconsider their decision.

More generally, the EU reiterates its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and actions. Settlements are illegal under international law. They constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible. The status of Jerusalem is a final status issue. The aspirations of both parties for Jerusalem must be fulfilled, and a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States.

There is pressing need for a political horizon to be restored. This is why the EU and its members States in past months have been so vocal in reconfirming their united, consolidated position in support for the two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the future capital of both States. We simply do not see any other viable option. Any alternative would play into the hands of extremists and potentially cause unrest and instability throughout the region.

The EU reiterates that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. We repeat that Syria needs a political solution and a political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). Yet the Syrian regime, supported by its allies Russia and Iran, has intensified its military operations without regard for civilian casualties and has continued its violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

The EU deplores the repeated violations of de-escalation agreements and urges the Astana guarantors — Russia, Iran and Turkey — to ensure the cessation of hostilities and unhindered, safe and sustainable humanitarian access throughout all of Syria. The EU also deplores the Russian-backed regime offensive in south-west Syria, which has again led to widespread displacement. The EU calls upon all parties to the conflict, especially the regime and its allies, to implement a cessation of hostilities to enable the safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of aid consistent with applicable international law, as demanded in Security Council resolution 2401 (2018).

The EU calls on all parties to respect the terms of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as to allow the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force to properly fulfil its mandate and ensure the safety and security of its peacekeeping personnel.

Accountability for war crimes will remain a high priority for the EU, and we will continue to support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, as well as other organizations contributing to its efforts. In that context, the EU welcomes the adoption, at the Special Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention held on 27 June, of a decision

condemning the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and by Da'esh, and mandating the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to identify those responsible for chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

The EU is concerned about the potential consequences that Law No. 10, adopted by the Syrian regime, may have for the future return of Syrian internationally displaced persons and refugees. That law may also contribute to a change in the social, political, economic and sectarian landscape of Syria.

The EU intends to host a high-level event on Syria at the seventy-third session of the General Assembly to reaffirm its strong commitment to a political solution to the Syria conflict and to sustaining international engagement to address the humanitarian and resilience needs of people inside Syria and in the region through the pledges made at the two Brussels conferences.

Finally, I would like to comment on Iraq. The EU has been following closely the popular protests in Iraq. The right of citizens to assemble freely and protest is fundamental. Citizens' unhindered access to information must be guaranteed. Protests should remain peaceful, and Iraqi security forces must exercise maximum restraint. We would like to signal our offer to hold a side event on Iraq at the Assembly's seventy-third session as a follow-up to the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq, held in February in Kuwait. Iraq has the potential to become a success story in the region for its post-Da'esh transition, ongoing stabilization and democratic consolidation. However, as we are currently seeing, Iraq still faces major challenges entailing important risks.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Muhammad Bande (Nigeria): I thank the delegation of Sweden for organizing today's open debate. Our special appreciation goes to the briefer for sharing his insightful perspectives on this very important subject.

Nigeria aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Nigeria notes with grave concern the alarming situation in many parts of the Middle East, particularly in Palestine. It is pertinent for all parties to make genuine and concerted efforts to find peaceful solutions and to cooperate closely with the United Nations and its agencies in order to achieve the shared objective of a two-State solution, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions and international law.

We must not allow recent developments to obscure the underlying problem of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is evident that a departure from the current crisis and a revival of the peace process is hardly achievable without ending or reversing the policy of settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories. We believe that there are a number of specific actions that are necessary to foster mutual respect, to compromise and to build confidence, as well as to pave the way for the realization of the two-State solution.

In that regard, we encourage Israel to take concrete steps to freeze and reverse all settlement-related activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. For their part, Palestinian leaders must also signal their readiness to return to the negotiating table by making enhanced efforts to forge unity and deal with militancy and other internal security challenges. It is beyond doubt that violence and unilateral actions will not resolve the long-drawn-out conflict.

My delegation reaffirms its full support for the rights of the Palestinian people. Those include the protection of their fundamental human rights, particularly their right to free movement and self-determination, and the maintenance of the dignity of the individual Palestinian person and their inalienable right to live without the fear of persecution. To that end, the Security Council must not fail in its duty and responsibility to the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, Nigeria calls on States with influence over the concerned parties to encourage them to re-engage in dialogue on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and other existing agreements. We reaffirm our unwavering support for a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine existing side-by-side in peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mrs. Yalçın (Turkey): The Middle East faces a number of challenges, including civil wars, humanitarian crises, terrorism and sectarianism. But those problems are not inherent in the history or culture of the region. We can overcome them, and we have reasons to be optimistic. The defeat of Da'esh in

Iraq was a promising development. Turkey's operations against Da'esh and the Kurdish Workers Party, the Democratic Union Party and the People's Protection Units were important steps in our common fight against terrorism. Now the international community must be united to build upon those achievements on the basis of international law.

What the Palestinians have been witnessing in the last few months is total disregard for all the values we have vowed to uphold since the establishment of the United Nations system and a clear violation of international law. On 1 June (see S/PV.8274), the Security Council once again failed to shoulder its responsibility to maintain international peace and security. The Council's draft resolution S/2018/516, on the protection of Palestinian civilians, could have been a small step towards overcoming the deep sense of injustice and resentment in the Middle East. It was a call to alleviate human suffering and to look for peaceful means to deter and prevent attacks on civilians.

Upon the Council's failure to act, the General Assembly had to take action on 13 June (see A/ES-10/PV.38). With the adoption of resolution ES-10/20, the Assembly restored the credibility of the United Nations. It proved that the Palestinian people are not alone in the face of grave violations of their fundamental rights. Now, the international community should closely monitor the implementation of the resolution, which calls on the Secretary-General to submit his recommendations, including on the international protection mechanism.

Last week we saw yet another provocative development. The Jewish nation-State law, adopted by the Israeli Parliament, disregards the universal principles of international law and the fundamental rights of the Palestinian citizens of Israel. It aims to disguise the ongoing occupation and discard the vision of the two-State solution. The international community should react to that law.

I will not elaborate on the remark the representative of Israel made about my country. It is an attempt to cover up Israel's illegal practices and actions, and it aims to create a distraction.

We should never forget that the historical injustice against the Palestinian people fuels hatred, alienation and radicalism in the region and beyond. It is time for the international community to renew its engagement in seeking a solution to the problem. Turkey will continue to support efforts to find a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict and to establish a sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

While we maintain our hopes for a political solution, we cannot ignore the humanitarian consequences of the occupation. As of 1 July, Turkey assumed the chairmanship of the Advisory Commission of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). That vital Agency is faced with a serious budget shortfall. Turkey's focus, during its Advisory Commission chairmanship, will be on placing the Agency on a sufficient, sustainable and predictable footing. Bringing to life the endowment fund of the World Bank and the Waqf Fund of the Islamic Development Bank will create crucial new avenues for the sustainable financing of the Agency.

I will not go into the details of the references made by the representative of the United States about my country. Let me briefly note for the record that we are not a nation known to publicize or praise ourselves for our humanitarian or development assistance. What we do for Palestine and Palestinian refugees is not limited to our contributions to and through UNRWA. We would be pleased to share privately the details of our assistance with those interested, but at this meeting let me just recall that according to Global Humanitarian Assistance programme, Development Initiatives, Turkey is the leading country in that respect, with $8.7 billion in humanitarian assistance. This represents a 0.85 per cent ratio between our national income and humanitarian assistance globally and makes us the most generous country in the world.

In Syria, the regime continues to seek a military solution. Needless to say, this approach is doomed to fail and serves only to exacerbate the plight of the Syrian people. There has, however, been some progress towards the establishment of a constitutional committee. Almost two weeks ago, the opposition submitted its updated list of candidates for the constitutional committee to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria.

The Astana guarantors will continue their discussions on the committee with Mr. De Mistura in Geneva in the coming weeks and at their next meeting, to be held at the end of the month. The United Nations-led Geneva process remains the main venue for finding a lasting political solution to the Syrian conflict,

in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

I would like to briefly touch upon Law No. 10 enacted by the Syrian regime, which seeks to confiscate the properties of millions of displaced Syrians. Law No. 10, if implemented, would threaten to expropriate millions of displaced Syrians, depriving them of their homes and land. This clearly runs counter to and grossly undermines the United Nations-led efforts to find a political solution, jeopardizes reconciliation prospects and flagrantly defies the fundamental principles of international law.

Two weeks ago, in a joint letter addressed to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General signed by 40 countries, including Turkey and Germany, we urged the international community to oppose the implementation of this law.

In the face of the grim developments on the ground, our determination to address the plight of the Palestinian and Syrian people and our trust in their resilience remain strong.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Niang (*spoke in French*): Speaking for the first time in my capacity as Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I should like, Mr. President, to commend the effective manner in which your delegation is conducting the work of the Security Council this month and to welcome the holding of this open debate, which represents a fresh opportunity to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Just yesterday the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein, speaking to our Committee on the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, touched upon the many obstacles impeding a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. It is up to the Security Council to ensure that its resolutions are implemented.

As the occupying Power, Israel must take responsibility for ensuring the protection of Palestinian civilians, in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the Council, including resolution 2417 (2018), on the protection of civilians in conflict. However, since March, when the current wave of violence began, at least 146 Palestinians have lost their lives in Gaza and approximately 15,000, including many children, have been wounded. The Committee reaffirms its support for the numerous appeals made by the international community, including by the Secretary-General, for an independent, transparent inquiry into these incidents. It also supports the commission of inquiry established by the Human Rights Council.

The Committee therefore looks forward to the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly resolution ES-10/20, on specific proposals relating to the international protection of the Palestinian civilian population.

The civilian population of Gaza is continuing to undergo indescribable suffering and deprivation. The additional restrictions imposed recently by the Israeli Government are exacerbating an already disastrous situation. Meanwhile, the parties have an obligation under international humanitarian law to guarantee humanitarian access and medical care for populations in need.

While expressing our deep concern about the threat of a further military confrontation in Gaza, we urge the Israeli authorities to lift the blockade of Gaza and to refrain from the disproportionate use of force. The Committee also calls for genuine reconciliation among Palestinian political actors in order to help address more effectively the significant security, humanitarian and socioeconomic challenges facing the civilian population, especially in Gaza.

For decades the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has been a life-saver for millions of Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, providing them with education, health care and humanitarian assistance and promoting sustainable development. However, the Agency is currently facing one of the most serious crises of its existence owing to a considerable financial deficit of $217 million. I take this opportunity to appeal once again to Member States to continue and strengthen their support for UNRWA.

Also of concern are the continued construction of illegal settlements, forced displacements, the confiscation of land and the demolition of Palestinian-owned homes and structures, in violation of the recent resolution 2334 (2016), all of which jeopardize the two-State solution.

The Committee therefore encourages the Secretary-General to continue to issue written reports on resolution 2334 (2016), including by providing information on the implementation of paragraph 5, which calls on Member States, in their dealings with Israel, to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967.

In June, the Committee organized a conference on Jerusalem during which all member States and all participants, including Israelis, reiterated the illegal nature of the recent decisions to establish embassies in Jerusalem while also calling on the international community to provide full support to the Palestinian population living in East Jerusalem.

Lastly, the Committee remains convinced that in order to be lasting, the solution to this dispute must be based on international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Zaayman (South Africa): We join other Member States in expressing our appreciation to Sweden for having convened this open debate on the situation the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. It is our belief that these periodic debates are necessary to maintain the attention of the international community, specifically the Security Council, to assist both Palestine and Israel in finding a lasting solution to the conflict, which has seemed intractable for so long.

However, it must be emphasized that these open debates should not be a substitute for the regular consideration by and deliberation of the Security Council on the matter, but should, rather, reinforce the work of the Council in moving the peace process forward.

The escalation of violence typified by the exchange of mortar and rocket fire between Gaza and Israel and the excessive use of force by the Israeli military on 13 and 14 July is of serious concern to South Africa. We further lament the recent tightening of the restrictions on cargo crossing into Gaza through the Kerem Shalom border crossing and the retaliatory limitations placed on Gaza's fishermen, which we see as an act of collective punishment against the residents of Gaza. Such disproportionate and brutal acts constitute a grave violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law while further exacerbating tensions in the region and hindering the possibility of any efforts to resume Palestinian-Israeli peace talks. In that regard, I wish to stress that South Africa remains committed to the belief that there can be no military solution to the conflict and that peaceful negotiations are the only means of ensuring lasting peace, security and stability in the region.

We must take note of the stark realities outlined in the most recent report of Secretary-General on the situation (S/2018/614). The fact that Gaza experiences power cuts for up to 22 hours per day severely undermines providing essential services. In addition to that dire situation, water is available to households for only a few hours every four to five days. Such severe conditions are exacerbated by the unprecedented $250-million budgetary shortfall that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) presently faces. We therefore appeal to all Member States to continue and increase their vital humanitarian assistance and support to the Palestinian people and UNRWA, which, beyond humanitarian aid, also provides for the preservation of the dignity and rights of the Palestinian people. South Africa remains committed to continuing its support for UNRWA through its financial contributions.

My delegation is deeply concerned about the continuation of illegal Israeli settlement activity which, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report, continues unabated and undermines the hope of establishing a viable Palestinian State. The decision by Israel to advance, approve and tender some 3,500 housing units in the occupied West Bank — the largest single batch of advancements in 2017 — only serves to further obstruct the possibility of a two-State solution. Besides the practical impediment that those settlements pose, we also agree with the Secretary-General's view that the construction of further settlements constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016).

The Palestinian people continue to look to the United Nations, specifically the Security Council, to assist them in realizing their right to self-determination. The assumption of the Council's responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security, particularly in terms of the long-standing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, is long overdue. The Council has a fundamental role to play in de-escalating tensions and encouraging the resumption of peace talks between the parties in an increasingly difficult political and security context, defined by

inflammatory rhetoric, distrust, escalating violence, ongoing settlement activity and the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

In conclusion, we strongly believe that the situation on the ground cannot be allowed to continue unchanged and remains a blight on the conscience of the international community. South Africa concurs with the international community that the only way to bring about genuine and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine is through comprehensive and unconditional negotiations dealing with all final-status issues, including the unrelenting expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories of Palestine, the lifting of the illegal Gaza blockade and the continuing occupation of Palestinian territory. That will contribute immensely towards peace and security throughout the wider Middle East region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): I wish to thank Sweden for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I also express my Government's steadfast support to Security Council members and the Secretary-General for their relentless efforts in preparing the first written report (S/2018/614) on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

The situation in the Middle East continues to worsen because the rule of law is being ignored, the fundamental rights of the people are being violated and the relevant resolutions of the Council are being disregarded. The blockade of Gaza is illegal and inhumane. The attacks on Gaza, which have escalated in recent days, are illegal. The Government of Maldives condemns those acts of aggression and calls on Israel to lift the blockade and cease attacks.

The United Nations, in particular the Security Council, needs to take urgent measures to protect civilians and ensure the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Council's historic resolution 2334 (2016) is very clear in reaffirming the illegality of Israeli occupation and settlements in occupied Palestine. The report mandated by that resolution also finds that Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, have no validity and constitute a clear violation of international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution.

Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures have continued across the West Bank, where demolitions have increased overall across Area C by 94 per cent. Schools and even donor-funded housing are being dismantled. The Council needs to take immediate action to ensure that the occupying Power fulfils its obligations under international law. The Council long ago declared null and void, through resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980), the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine, the annexation of the Holy City of Jerusalem, the shifting of the Israeli capital to Jerusalem, the decision by any country to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the transfer of its embassy to Jerusalem.

Through resolution 2334 (2016), the Council calls upon States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. Yet we do not observe any meaningful efforts by some Member States in respecting those resolutions. The Maldives has always believed that an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its Capital, established within the 1967 borders and living side by side and in peace and harmony with Israel is the best and the only solution to the conflict.

More than half a million people have been killed since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict. All that remains in the conflict zones is the rubble of homes, livelihoods, hospitals, schools and basic infrastructure. In every corner, we see fear and uncertainty in the hearts and minds of the Syrian people. The international community must reinvigorate talks to reach a peaceful settlement to the conflict. Terrorist groups are running rampant in conflict zones in the Middle East. They do not respect borders, distinguish between the young and old or women and men, or respect any religion or culture. We must tackle the enabling factors of terrorism through international cooperation, while sharing information and coherent strategies.

The Security Council, while considering approaches to conflict resolution, must use the tools and frameworks that already exist within the United Nations system, not just military options. A key approach would be to focus on State-building and strengthening State institutions to resolve conflict and sustain peace. The Government and the people of the Maldives remain in solidarity with the people in the Middle East, in particular the Government and the people of Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Rodríguez Abascal (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We support the statement delivered by delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Cuba expresses its deep concern about the dangerous deterioration of the situation of the Middle East since the last open debate on the issue (see S/PV.8244). It is extremely regrettable that, because of the repeated obstruction of one of its members, the Security Council has been unable to condemn the escalation of violence and the tragic events that have occurred in the Gaza Strip since 30 March and led to the deaths of dozens of people and more than 4,000 wounded. Cuba has repeatedly condemned the use of excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate force by Israeli forces against civilians in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and especially the Gaza Strip, in serious and flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law. Like the majority of members of the international community, Cuba supported resolution ES-10/20, adopted by the General Assembly at the resumption of its emergency special session on 13 June, pursuant to which the Secretary-General must present recommendations concerning an international protection mechanism for the Palestinian civilian population under Israeli occupation.

We once again condemn the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, including the advancement, approval and building of 3,500 homes in settlements in the West Bank, moving forward plans to build 2,300 units and the demolition and seizure of at least 84 Palestinian-owned structures, while affecting the livelihoods of Palestinians and resulting in their forced displacement. All those cruel and destructive measures, along with the criminal and illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip, are not only grave violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention, but also diminish the prospects of a two-State solution and undermine the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people and Arab nations.

Cuba reiterates its impassioned plea for the Security Council to assume its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations, in the interest of international peace and security, by adopting the necessary measures and demanding that Israel immediately end its occupation of Palestinian territories, its aggressive policies and colonizing practices, and that it comply with Council resolutions on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question — particularly resolution 2334 (2016).

We express our solidarity with the Palestinian Government and people. We reiterate our unwavering support for a broad, just, peaceful and lasting solution to the Palestinian question — the centre of the Arab-Israeli conflict — on the basis of a two-State solution that will allow the Palestinians to exercise their right to self-determination, their right to an independent sovereign State, with its capital in east Jerusalem and within pre-1967 borders, and their right of return for refugees. We will continue to support the accession of Palestine as a full-fledged member of the United Nations.

Cuba reiterates its deep concern about and rejection of the unilateral declaration of the President of the United States recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel — a serious and flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter, international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. We call for an end to intervention in other States' internal affairs, foreign aggression and the support, financing and supplying of weapons to terrorist groups in order to promote instability and conflicts in the Middle East. We call for an end to pretexts and arguments in the Council attempting to legitimize the unilateral use of force and aggression against sovereign States.

We demand the total and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the Syrian Golan and from all occupied Arab territories. Any action taken or to be taken in order to modify the legal, physical, demographic condition or the institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, or any measures taken by Israel to exercise its jurisdiction and administration in that territory are violations of international law, international agreements, the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations, including resolution 497 (1981), and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Finally, Cuba expresses its total rejection of the decision of the United States Government to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the nuclear agreement with Iran, and to reimpose sanctions against that country, which represents a clear breach of international commitments, undermines the norm of coexistence among States and could provoke grave consequences for stability and security in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Hamadi (Qatar) *(spoke in Arabic)*: At the outset, we would like to commend your efforts, Sir, as President of the Security Council for this month. We do appreciate your convening of this important open debate. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing and his efforts.

The ongoing participation of the State of Qatar in this open debate reflects its desire to establish peace and stability in the Middle East, not only because it belongs to that important region, but also because it believes in peaceful solutions to crises, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law. We also believe in the important role that could be played by the Security Council in addressing the various serious challenges in the region. The existing challenges and crises cast their shadows first and foremost over the peoples and States of the region. However, they have consequences that spill over. Therefore, it is important to pool the efforts of the international community to achieve security, stability and crises settlement in the region. The Middle East issue is paramount in that regard.

The concerning and escalating events in the Gaza Strip remind the international community of the urgent importance of finding a permanent, fair and comprehensive settlement to the Palestinian question, as that is the only guarantee against the recurrence of such crises and their serious humanitarian consequences. The general framework of this settlement is very well known to all. It should take place according to the agreed criteria and the Arab Peace Initiative, which ensure the peaceful coexistence of both parties based on the two-State solution and the establishment of a viable Palestinian State within the 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital. It is also important to respect the legal status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, pursuant to relevant Council resolutions, and to put an end to the Israeli occupation of all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and occupied Lebanese territories. Moreover, all settlement activities must immediately cease, refugees should be allowed the right of return and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people must be restored.

The State of Qatar reaffirms its support for any course that would contribute to relaunching negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis that might lead to the desired peace. The State of Qatar has always lived up to its responsibilities and will continue to make every effort to achieve peace in the Middle East and create an environment conducive to such peace. We call for everyone to make sincere efforts to that end. We must also ensure that no actions are taken to undermine such efforts. In that regard, we strongly condemn the nation-State law enacted by Israel, as well as the provocative actions taken against religious holy places, including breaking into the Al-Aqsa Mosque. It goes without saying that the deteriorating humanitarian situation, due to the ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip, undermines all international efforts for peace.

The Syrian crisis still casts its serious consequences on peace and security in the region and worldwide, because it is one of the biggest humanitarian catastrophes with the refugee crisis in modern history. That is why the State of Qatar reiterates that there is no alternative to a political solution for the Syrian crisis, based on Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex) and relevant Council resolutions that respond to the legitimate aspirations for security and stability of the brotherly Syrian people and preserve the national and regional integrity of Syria.

More than one year has elapsed since the artificial Gulf crisis, not to mention the unfair blockade and the unilateral arbitrary measures imposed on the State of Qatar, which run counter to the fundamental principles of international law and international instruments pertaining to human rights, as well as the rules of international relations. I also note the adverse consequences it may yet have on regional and international cooperation for maintaining international peace and security.

The State of Qatar has always adopted a policy of maintaining peace and security, along with dialogue and the peaceful resolution of disputes and differences, as well as constructive collective efforts and good-neighbourly relations. That is why we reiterate our call for finding an end to this crisis through the mediation of His Highness the Amir of our sisterly Kuwait.

Since the onset of the crisis, the State of Qatar has reiterated that it is committed to addressing it within the framework of international law and the relevant bilateral and international conventions and mechanisms.

In this regard, we welcome yesterday's decision of the International Court of Justice approving the request by the State of Qatar to take interim measures against the United Arab Emirates in a case related to the discriminatory and illegal treatment of Qatari citizens by the United Arab Emirates. The Court's decision involves a request to the United Arab Emirates to guarantee the reunification of Qatari families, grant affected Qatari students an opportunity to finish their studies in the United Arab Emirates or get their educational records, and ensure access by affected Qataris to courts and judicial bodies in the United Arab Emirates.

The perilous repercussions of this artificial crisis and its direct impact on international peace and security call for the immediate lifting of the unilateral, arbitrary and illegal procedures and unfair blockade against the State of Qatar and for maintaining dialogue as a means to put an end to any dispute.

In conclusion, we reiterate that the State of Qatar will continue to be an effective and supportive partner of the international efforts aimed at bringing peace to the Middle East through the peaceful settlement of disputes, which would contribute to fulfilling the Security Council's objectives in terms of maintaining international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the competent Swedish presidency of the Security Council this month. I would also like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Mladenov, for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Security and stability cannot be ensured except by establishing peace and development, securing a decent life for the people, uprooting terrorism and its obscure ideology, and protecting young people, who represent the present and the future of nations. Jordan underscores the centrality of the Palestinian question and the importance of achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that would ensure the rights of the Palestinian people to liberty, dignity and an independent State based on the two-State solution, which requires the creation of an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, pursuant to international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative and through direct and serious negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians to address all issues related to final status. We believe that it is necessary to continue our coordination with our brothers in the Palestinian authorities to put an end to the Israeli occupation and respond to our brothers' aspirations to liberty and an independent State.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan continues to defend Jerusalem and its sacred Muslim and Christian sites because we have historical guardianship over them in East Jerusalem. We will spare no effort to counter Israeli attempts to alter the historic and legal status of Jerusalem.

Jordan condemns Israel's latest aggression against the Palestinian people, in particular the forced displacement of inhabitants of Khan Al-Ahmar and Abu Nuwar villages, in order to expand the Israeli settlements, which constitute a threat that undermines peace prospects. Jordan also condemns the latest attacks against the Palestinians in Gaza and the excessive use of force in contravention of international law and the United Nations resolutions. These Israeli attacks have claimed more innocent civilian victims in the Gaza Strip, which is suffering from a siege that runs counter to all international humanitarian laws. We recall the importance of General Assembly resolution ES-10/20, adopted in June, guaranteeing international protection for Palestinian civilians. It is also necessary for the Secretary-General to include practical recommendations in his future reports to be implemented in this context.

Jordan condemns in the strongest terms the nation-State Law adopted by Israel last week. This law enshrines racial segregation in Israel and the occupied territories and categorically contradicts international law and international conventions. It will only exacerbate acts of violence and extremism. We call on the international community to oppose this law so as to preserve peace and stability in the region and around the world.

The financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a source of concern for us. Despite recent contributions, the dangerous shortfall in UNRWA's finances could undermine the provision of essential services in education, health care and social support and have an impact on millions of refugees,

in particular young people and children caught up in attempts to politicize this essential Agency, which is providing vital services in the context of the ongoing Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the inability of refugees to return to their homes.

The Syrian crisis is entering its eighth year and Jordan's borders remain open to our Syrian brothers, in particular for the delivery of humanitarian assistance by the United Nations under resolution 2165 (2014). Humanitarian assistance is continuously provided to our brothers in the south of Syria. The Kingdom hosts 1.3 million Syrian refugees, with whom we have been sharing food, water, schools and medical care until such time as they are able to return home.

We have also worked tirelessly to bring an end to the crisis in the south of Syria. In recent weeks, efforts have allowed us to encourage the parties concerned to reach a ceasefire and achieve reconciliation in the south-west of the country and to ensure that assistance is provided to displaced persons near the Jordanian border. We have made efforts to allow for the return of these people to their villages in Syria. We hope for a political process, under the auspices of the United Nations, that is global and comprehensive, preserves the territorial integrity of Syria and its citizens, and ensures the return of refugees pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015) and Geneva agreements. The political solution to the Syrian crisis is the only means to end acts of killing and destruction.

More than half of the world's population is under the age of 30, and 70 per cent of them are in regions that are experiencing armed conflicts, namely, the Middle East and Africa. International developments, especially in the Middle East, have created instability and left their impact on children and young people, most of whom cannot gain access to education and the vital services they need, whether due to displacement or the decline of national economies owing to these continued conflicts.

Once again, we call for the necessary conditions to be provided so that a generation of young people can contribute to the building and prosperity of the Middle East and beyond. This generation needs to be one that believes in rapprochement and moderation so as to counter extremist ideology and divisions among nations. To achieve that end, our only choice, is to take decisive and urgent measures to rebuild confidence and overcome divisions so as to achieve fair and comprehensive peace that can meet the aspirations of all the people in the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Abdelaziz *(spoke in Arabic)*: The Security Council meets today against the backdrop of an unprecedented and very serious Israeli escalation of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. It is a blatant violation of international law that undermines the ability of the Security Council and the international community to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Despite repeated international appeals to Israel, the occupying Power, to respect its obligations under international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, international humanitarian law and international human rights law, Israel continues to disregard them. It pursues its policy of entrenching the occupation and undermining the prospects of the Palestinian people establishing its independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in a useless attempt to eliminate the concept of the two-State solution, which is the essence of the peace process.

Israel continues its illegal settlement policy in clear and grave violation of resolution 2334 (2016). This policy poses a serious threat to the peace process, as Israel is relentless in its attempts to remove 46 Bedouin groups, totalling more than 10,000 Palestinians, in order to prevent them from returning to their land in southern Israel. The forced displacement of Abu Nuwar and Khan Al-Ahmar Bedouins — with their houses, schools and health centres demolished, despite the fact that 53 per cent of them are children and 95 per cent are registered as refugees with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) — is yet another Israeli attempt to create an illusion of Greater Israel by preventing refugees from returning to their land, seizing the land of Bedouin Palestinians and demolishing their homes in order to expand the illegal settlements of Ma'ale Adumim and Kfar Adumim, make them contiguous to occupied East Jerusalem and end the desirable contiguity for the West Bank.

Furthermore, the Israeli settlement expansion is not only overwhelming, but has been extended to include a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian people. Since the events of Land Day, on 30 March,

and according to the Israeli authorities, the Israeli army has killed more than 150 defenceless Palestinian demonstrators, including at least 22 children, and injured more than 15,300, some of them critically. This has occurred despite resolution ES-10/20, which was adopted by the General Assembly at its resumed tenth emergency special session on 13 June, calling on Israeli forces to stop their use of live ammunition against the defenceless Palestinian people and to protect the right of Palestinians to peaceful demonstration, in accordance with their commitments as an occupying Power, under the Geneva Conventions.

The Israeli aerial bombardment of Gaza on 13 July, which targeted women and defenceless children, only strengthens our conviction that we need an effective international mechanism to protect the Palestinian people against barbaric Israeli aggression, in accordance with the aforementioned General Assembly resolution. The League of Arab States expects the Council to support the establishment of this mechanism by upholding important humanitarian principles, at the top of which is the responsibility to protect and human security, which are applied effectively by the Council in other parts of the world but not enforced in Palestine.

Israel's continued closure of the Karm Abu Salem crossing and the prevention of basic needs from entering the Gaza Strip are yet further humanitarian obstacles that have led to enormous suffering and a massive spike in the prices of basic goods, in particular as 49 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza are unemployed. The United States decided to stop financing UNRWA and froze its economic aid for the Palestinian Authority. Israel refuses to transfer taxes and custom fees to the Palestinian Authority, as it must pursuant to the Paris Protocol. Despite the pledges made at the UNRWA conference held on 25 June, and given the international community's belief that supporting UNRWA is one way to help resolve the refugee issue, the United States and Israel have a moral and financial responsibility for the Palestinian people until the refugee problem has been settled as one of the final-status issues.

I would like to reply to certain comments made today by saying that Arab and Islamic Governments and peoples are no less generous than the Governments and peoples of the United States and other donor countries, to which we express our deep appreciation. Arab and Islamic countries have contributed billions of dollars to support UNRWA over the years to ease the humanitarian suffering of Palestinian refugees. Allow me to correct false information. Since the United States stopped supporting UNRWA and in accordance with confirmed 2018 pledges of $716.88 million, as published by UNRWA, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait alone have pledged more than $200 million, in addition to smaller contributions made by other Arab countries. Those donations were made despite the fact that none of those countries contributed to the Palestinian refugee crisis.

Lastly, Israel's defiance of the international community reached its peak when the Israeli Knesset recently adopted its nation-State law, stipulating that the State of Israel is for Jewish people alone, not for Palestinians. Hebrew is the official language, not Arabic. Immigration into Israel is permitted to Jews, not to Christians, Muslims or others. It encourages settlement-building in a new step to annex the West Bank, consecrate racism, legitimize the apartheid exercised by the Israeli Government on ethnic, religious and linguistic grounds, and entrench the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians within the Green Line as a way to maintain the Jewish identity of the State.

The League of Arab States strongly condemns this law enacted by the Knesset, which denies the right of the Palestinian people to their historic land and perpetuates horrendous colonialism and racist Israeli practices against the Palestinians by means of using force to impose a de facto situation on the ground, expropriate land, demolish buildings and build settlements.

In conclusion, the League of Arab States affirms that this ugly racist law and all similar laws imposed forcibly by the Israeli occupation are null and void. They are not legitimate, as declared by the international community. We call on the international community itself, with all of its States and organizations, to assume its responsibility and force Israel to respect international law and recognize the rights of the Palestinian people. This will not happen without establishing a clear mechanism to protect the defenceless Palestinian people from the tyranny of the Israeli occupation. In that context, we look forward to the proposals of the Secretary-General and the support of the Security Council and the General Assembly for those recommendations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Yánez Loza (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank you, Sir, for convening today's open debate. We thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special

Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing and for his ongoing efforts to achieve peace in the region.

Two weeks ago, we were warned that, in recent months, the situation on the Gaza strip had deteriorated and was now on the brink of conflict. Yesterday, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People heard from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein, who referred to the dramatic escalation of tension and the potential for an escalation that would destabilize the region, and warned of the fragility of the situation, despite the agreed ceasefire. He described the violence, poverty and unemployment that are exacerbating the already tragic humanitarian crisis. The media compel us to watch, almost in real time, the exchanges of fire, which are the heaviest since 2014; air strikes with missiles; and deaths, including the deaths of children. We must ensure that the immediacy of this tragedy does not desensitize us to the violence.

On Sunday, we learned from the United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Mr. James McGoldrick, how the lack of fuel in Gaza, the provision of which has been restored today, endangered the medical care and potentially the lives of 2,000 patients, including newborns. Everything I have just mentioned shapes our understanding of the situation in Palestine, which we find on the monthly and quarterly agendas of the Security Council, as well as on the agendas of the Economic and Social Council and the Human Rights Council. The prevalence of this issue is a reflection of the seriousness of the situation, which is only getting worse, given the violations of human rights, international humanitarian law, the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Against that backdrop, 120 States members of the General Assembly, including Ecuador, voted on 13 June in favour of resolution ES-10/20, on the protection of the Palestinian civilian population, motivated by concern about those acts of violence against civilians and the need to implement accountability measures.

Ecuador is concerned not only about the ongoing deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the lack of funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. It is also concerned about Israel's adoption of new laws with exclusionary and discriminatory provisions and the demolitions announced in the West Bank that contravene the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and resolution 1322 (2000), on the Conventions' applicability, and that violate resolution 2334 (2016). The expansion of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory threatens not only international peace and security, but also the two-State solution, to which the Security Council and the international community are committed.

Ecuador once again reiterates its full commitment to Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. At the same time, it reaffirms that the political solution to the Palestinian situation requires a two-State solution, negotiated by the parties, within the pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. We urge the Security Council to not remain indifferent to the worsening humanitarian and political situation, but to work to implement measures to enable it to implement its own resolutions.

In conclusion, Ecuador stresses that combating impunity independently, impartially and effectively is essential. It is equally necessary to address the causes of conflicts, as that is the basis for lasting peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Islam (Bangladesh): I have the pleasure to deliver my statement on behalf of the States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). I extend my sincere congratulations to Sweden and wish it every success, as the President of the Security Council for this month.

This meeting is taking place amid severe challenges besetting the Palestinian cause as a result of the escalation in Israeli systematic violations against the Palestinian people, their land and their sanctities. Israel's ongoing aggression and threats against the Palestinian Bedouin community of Khan Al-Ahmar is clearly another deplorable chapter in Israel's illegal, oppressive and destructive measures, replicating a constant Israeli colonial, ethnic-cleansing and displacement policy that has been aggravating the ongoing human tragedy of the Palestinian people. Such policy of forcible transfer of the Palestinian population irrefutably constitutes a grave breach of international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention and amounts to a war crime, which highlights once again the urgent need for accountability.

These developments, together with all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, are all null and void and have no legal validity whatsoever and directly violate the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations. The OIC will therefore remain resolute that any form of recognition thereof, whether explicit or implicit, is illegal and bound to have far-reaching and dangerous consequences on facilitating and deepening the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem by Israel, thereby undermining the possibility of implementing the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders.

In that regard, we condemn Israel's continued settlement colonization of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in contempt of the Security Council's resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016) and the relevant provisions of international law. That illegal settlement policy, entrenching Israel's decades-long military occupation of the Palestinian land, remains a core challenge to the will of the international community and a major obstacle to peace. It is a litmus test for international collective resolve and particularly that of the Council, which is required to take concrete actions to ensure respect for and compliance with its resolutions and prevent unilateral actions by Israel, the occupying Power, that seriously undermine the vision of the two-State solution to which we are committed, as such acts have repeatedly thwarted a peaceful solution to this conflict.

It is incumbent on the Security Council to intervene urgently, responsibly and effectively to avert dire repercussions that may plunge the volatile region into a cycle of further instability. The Security Council should, in that regard, take decisive action to implement its relevant resolutions, including those pertaining to Jerusalem, including resolutions 476 (1980), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016).

As the Israeli military onslaught, which has surpassed all levels of brutality, continues to claim the lives of hundreds of Palestinian civilians who have been peacefully marching to protest the illegal Israeli blockade, and aggravates the already critical humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, its tragic consequences and implications should be central to all international efforts. Immediate action should be taken to halt the human rights violations by Israel, avoid and end impunity, ensure accountability for its crimes and illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip, provide international protection for the Palestinian people and address the dire humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The ongoing plight of millions of Palestine refugees reflects the cruel reality of missing justice. While praising in that regard the role and endeavours of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), the continued need for its services bears witness to the dire situation being endured by Palestinian refugees across the region and embodies political commitment to their right to return. The OIC reiterates its call, on this occasion, for the international community to make sure their plight and growing needs are receiving adequate attention, including in terms of necessary funding to UNRWA, and to assume their historical, political, legal and humanitarian responsibilities towards finding a just and durable solution to the question of Palestinian refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

In addition to the current political stalemate, the continuation of Israeli settlement policies constitutes a serious obstacle hampering the just and lasting settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The OIC group remains firm in its conviction that the Security Council must act to enhance prospects for peace, hope and justice and maintain the viability of the two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders, through immediate engagement, along with international actors, in launching and sponsoring a multilateral political process to resolve all final status issues, on the basis of the long-standing terms of reference and parameters enshrined in United Nations resolutions and within a specific time frame.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Ms. Krisnamurthi (Indonesia): Let me first congratulate the delegation of Sweden on acceding to the presidency for this month and convey my appreciation for the briefing given earlier by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov. I would also like to align our statement with those delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

It is significant that this is the first meeting of this Security Council since its failure once again last month (see S/PV.8274) to fulfil its duty towards the Palestinian people, which is enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Following that sad event, and in response to the overwhelming outrage of the membership of the United

Nations, the General Assembly adopted the analogous resolution ES-10/20. Indonesia is very pleased to acknowledge the enormous support for the Palestinian issue throughout the international community.

However, as usual, the will of the majority prevails on paper, but reality shows the opposite. We are very saddened by the fact that hundreds of Palestinians were killed and thousands injured, including women and children, in the latest wave of violence unleashed on a defenceless civilian population, and once again this organ has failed those victims. With those events in view, we will again remind this organ — and we will do it again and again — that the heart of the conflict in Palestine is the occupation and illegal settlement. It is therefore a dangerous irony that not only have we failed to stop the illegal activities of the occupying forces, but we have also almost completely failed to protect unarmed civilians from the atrocities. It is distressing, and indeed shameful, to observe our insensitivity on that matter, as human lives seem to have no value because they are the lives of others, rather than our own. We must understand that the highest form of justice is safety and security.

To that end, we reaffirm that the Palestinian people, as in the case of all peoples everywhere in the world, are entitled to the basic right of protection in accordance with international law. It is the obligation of the Security Council to protect civilians. In our view, common humanity demands that we reject the use of excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate violence by the Israeli forces against Palestinian civilians, including the use of live ammunition against civilian protesters.

Indonesia calls for an end to the closures and restrictions imposed by Israel on movement and access into and out of Gaza. We again draw attention to the deteriorating conditions in Gaza, including the lack of basic economic and social needs and poor medical conditions, that are behind the cycle of conflicts. They also prepare the ground for idle youth to be recruited by terrorists or terrorist organizations. We therefore appeal to Member States to strengthen the efforts to assist Palestinians, including through multilateral, regional or bilateral channels. Such assistance can take any form, including capacity-building.

In that regard, I am pleased to say that Indonesia has already announced a $2-million commitment to assist Palestinians in capacity-building programmes, under the auspices of the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, in accordance with the needs of the Palestinian people.

Indonesia reiterates that the situation in Palestine is unsustainable and unjustifiable. We must bring to an end the excessive assault on the lives of Palestinians. Of equal importance, we must avoid conveying the dangerous impression on the ground that all hope is lost. We are fully optimistic that the rights of the Palestinians will be fulfilled. A crucial factor for the fulfilment of those rights is unity among Palestinians. We have high hope for the continuation and progress of the domestic reconciliation process. We believe that the world will not rest until Palestinians enjoy their inalienable rights.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Edrees (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Let me begin by extending our thanks to the Swedish presidency of the Security Council for holding this open debate and to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing today and his persistent efforts to settle the Palestinian question.

Regrettably, we meet again today to discuss the focal question that goes back over 70 years, remaining without settlement not because of a lack of ideas, the rules of international law or the resolutions of the Council, but because of the lack of ability or will to engage in serious negotiations to end the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan, and reach international consensus to restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State based on the 4 June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

There are multiple symptoms of the continued occupation and the absence of a clear political horizon. The region and the world have seen the injustice that has befallen successive generations of Palestinians, who still await their independence, the return of their land and the enjoyment of a dignified life like that enjoyed by other peoples of the planet, and like the Israeli people whose State was established by a resolution of this Organization, living side by side with the Palestinian people. Instead of seeing an end to such an unjust situation through the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, the two-State solution is regressing in an unprecedented way because illegal settlements and the demolition of Palestinian homes

are eating away at Palestinian land, while imposing an artificial division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Consequently, there have been more unilateral measures and decisions made with regard to the holy city of Jerusalem that contravene Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

The human tragedy witnessed in Gaza today is one of the grave symptoms that I have mentioned. Let me again caution on the situation of the people of Gaza, the huge pressures on them and the potential explosion of the situation there, due to the energy crisis, the crisis of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), confrontations with the Israeli security forces that have claimed the lives of scores of Palestinian victims, and the obstruction of movement to and from the Strip.

In that context, Egypt, voluntarily and in solidarity with the people of the Strip, worked to mitigate that humanitarian crisis during the past period, despite the fact that we do not have a legal responsibility to do so. We have opened the Rafah crossing, which is for individuals, and worked to alleviate that crisis. But those exceptional measures will not be enough until Israel lives live up to its responsibilities in accordance with international law and until the control of the Palestinian Authority over the Strip has been restored.

Egypt welcomes the interest of the Council in the humanitarian situation in the Strip. Let me recall that this situation has not arisen out of a vacuum and that any attempt to turn a blind eye to the root causes underlying the situation will only prolong the tragedy and lead to the potential collapse of the Strip. Therefore, I caution once again that the deteriorating situation is only one of the symptoms of the current stalemate in the peace process. It must not be addressed in isolation from the broader context of the Palestinian question and an end to the occupation. Gaza is part of the occupied Palestinian territory, as is the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

I call on the members of the Council, when they debate that question, to be guided by international law, international humanitarian law and specific, unambiguous responsibilities therein. Furthermore, I urge them to take into consideration previous experience and other accords that have regulated the movement to and from Gaza. I also implore them to refrain from consecrating fake accounts about the means to alleviate humanitarian suffering that focus on ways to excuse the occupying Power from its responsibilities or make other parties pay the price of that occupation, including by touching on the opening of crossings without clarifying the facts or specifying responsibilities.

In the same context, I call on the Palestinian parties as well to respond quickly to the Egyptian efforts in order to achieve reconciliation, and I appeal to the international community and members of the Security Council, notably the influential parties, to support these efforts and build upon them gradually, especially through steps that started effectively with the return of the Palestinian Authority to control the Gaza crossings.

I am not here today to talk once again about the violations or the injustices afflicting the Palestinian people. The Council and the international community are well aware of that. But let me reiterate the Egyptian call for a resumption of direct negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides on the basis of the clear and defined international guidelines contained in Council resolutions, most recently resolution 2334 (2016), and let me recall that these principles will remain valid as time goes on because the rights they reflect are inalienable. I recall once again that these rights are not the reason why we have not reached a political settlement; on the contrary, it is because they have been neglected, circumvented and not realized. This is why the international community has failed over the years to achieve peace. It has been shown that an economic approach alone will not work unless it is combined with a political vision or is the natural outcome of peace.

In conclusion, we look forward to any new serious initiatives for a comprehensive political settlement in the upcoming period. We are ready to support any such initiative politically and practically as long as it is based on restoring the Palestinians' legal rights. We reiterate that the Palestinian question remains the focal point of the Middle East, and dealing with the crises in that area must take this fact into consideration and not conflate it with other challenges.

Mr. Mayong Onon (Malaysia): At the outset, I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this important open debate, which allows non-Council members to express their views on the worrisome situation in the Middle East.

Malaysia wishes to associate itself with the statements delivered earlier by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned

Countries and by the representative of Bangladesh on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

We would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on and insights into the present situation in the region.

The adoption on 13 June, at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, of resolution ES-10/20, on the protection of the Palestinian civilian population — co-sponsored by Malaysia and supported by 120 States Members of the United Nations — sent a very strong message that called for the protection of the Palestinians from Israeli aggression, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Malaysia looks forward to the Secretary-General's report on the establishment of an international protection mechanism for the Palestinian civilian population.

We also welcomed the Secretary-General's first written report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), which was presented to the Council on 19 June (see S/PV.8289). The first written report will greatly help the Council in advancing the objectives set out in the resolution, especially in the light of Israel's continued indifference towards the Security Council and its resolutions.

The international community must therefore continue to demand that Israel stop all violations and illegal activities and fully comply with all its obligations as prescribed by the relevant Council resolutions as well as international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Malaysia will continue to provide assistance to the Palestinians, within its means. Malaysia also wishes to reiterate its position that a two-State solution, with Palestinians and Israelis living side by side in peace, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, is the only viable solution to this long-standing conflict.

We continue to reaffirm our unwavering support and solidarity with the Palestinian people, especially during the recent violence in Gaza, which could threaten peace and security in the Middle East. Malaysia will work closely with the international community, with multi-stakeholder participation, in finding a peaceful, just, sustainable and lasting solution to this longstanding issue.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Oussihamou (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. This initiative reflects the importance that your country attaches to the Palestinian question, in particular given the current conditions. I would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing on this issue.

We continue to monitor with great sorrow the deteriorating situation in the Middle East, in particular in Palestine. The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories continues to deteriorate owing to the Judaization and settlement policies, land-grabbing and coercion exercised by the occupying Israeli authorities against the Palestinian people in a systematic fashion, stoking more tensions and frustration.

In the past few days, we have seen these facts illustrated. The Israeli authorities have used unprecedented force against unarmed civilians, causing several victims. This has only exacerbated the situation, perpetuating the cycle of violence and counter-violence. The use of force and violence has never led to peace or to peaceful solutions. We are now witnessing the total absence of the conditions necessary for a dignified life, owing to the siege and acute shortage of essential goods. This stands in the way of launching a peace process on a firm basis.

The ongoing building settlements contrary to the United Nations resolutions, especially resolution 2334 (2016), is an act of provocation against the Palestinians and the international community. Unilateral policies that flout international legitimacy and international law have hampered the achievement of a two-State solution comprising an Israeli State and a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital and within 4 June 1967 borders.

Given our faith in the just Palestinian cause and our unconditional support for it, the Kingdom of Morocco hosted in the capital Rabat, from 26 to 28 June 2018, the fifth International Conference on Jerusalem under the slogan "The Palestinian question after 50 years of occupation and 25 years of Oslo accords". The conference addressed the Palestinian question along with the negative consequences of the stalled

negotiations. His Majesty King Mohammed VI, who chairs the Jerusalem Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said in his statement:

> "First, we reiterate that our support for the Palestinian question is absolute and untiring. This is a promise that will always be honoured by Morocco until the Palestinian people regain all their inalienable rights under international law and in accordance with the attestation of land and history."

His Majesty also added that it is the duty of the international community to pool its efforts in order to bring this issue to a fair and secure negotiating table and on a firm track, based on a realistic vision and a fixed timeframe and in line with the existing terms of reference. The two parties have to seriously participate and assume their responsibilities.

The Kingdom of Morocco has always stood beside the Palestinians and supported their just cause. This support is not limited to political and diplomatic one in international bodies, but involves a humanitarian aspect which deals with the Palestinian human being who yearns to live a decent life. That is why His Majesty King Mohammed VI has personally ensured the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people via the Mohammed V International Airport in Casablanca this past May. That process provided the Palestinian people with food and medicine, and ensured the establishment of a field hospital by the Moroccan Royal Armed Forces, as well as the provision of blankets and essential medications. The Mohammed V Foundation for Solidarity provided food aid. The Moroccan hospital in the Gaza Strip will also provide medical care for the Palestinian victims of the most recent incidents as well as for other citizens.

In conclusion, Morocco's position on this conflict is firm and based on the Arab Peace Initiative, the principle of achieving peace and the terms of reference relevant to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the 4 June 1967 borders, living side by side with the Israel in peace, security and harmony. As it has in the past, Morocco will spare no effort to engage with all initiatives that support the peace process and seeks a political settlement that will lead to security and stability in the region.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): At the outset, I would like to express my thanks to the Swedish presidency for convening this important open debate. I also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his updated briefing on the situation.

Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The current negative developments in the Middle East, particularly the recent deadly clashes and the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, have put the whole region's security at risk and seriously imperilled the prospect of the two-State solution. Despite the tireless efforts made for many years by the international community, including the United Nations and the Security Council, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved and has become even more complex, without any feasible and sustained political solution.

We are deeply concerned about the situation on the ground and strongly condemn and oppose all acts of violence, including the excessive use of lethal force against civilians and critical civilian facilities. We therefore join Special Envoy Mladenov in urging the parties concerned to exercise self-restraint and refrain from any act that would escalate tensions. All settlement construction and blockade activity need to stop immediately, while special attention must be focused on protecting and improving Palestinian lives in Gaza. It is also crystal clear that the Security Council should take swift and unified action to put the peace process back on track by creating favourable conditions for the pursuit of constructive dialogues and negotiations between the parties concerned.

Viet Nam has consistently supported the two-State solution, with a vision of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition within the pre-1967 borders. All solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be in line with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, as well as the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. We welcome all efforts and initiatives aiming at achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution, thereby ensuring the legitimate interests of both Israel and Palestine. We highly appreciate the indispensable role and tireless efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for

Palestine Refugees in the Near East to ease the suffering of the Palestinians.

Viet Nam reaffirms its support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent and sovereign State. We reiterate our unwavering commitment to working with you, Mr. President, and all other Member States to end the conflict, thereby bringing sustainable peace and security to the region.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Giacomelli da Silva (Brazil): We too would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

Brazil wishes to express its long-standing support for the implementation of a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized and mutually agreed borders based on the 1967 lines, in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the established guidelines of the peace process. At the heart of that formula is the need to work towards a Palestinian State that is fully sovereign, economically viable and territorially contiguous, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In that regard, the expansion of Israeli settlements in Palestine, which are illegal under international law, and the incitement and inflammatory rhetoric on both sides continue to hinder the achievement of lasting peace in the region. Brazil is also following with concern the situation of the Palestinian village of Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu and urges the Israeli authorities to rescind its decision to demolish the village, which is in contravention of international law. The Brazilian Government also reaffirms its understanding that the final status of the city of Jerusalem should be defined in negotiations between Israel and Palestine based on the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Brazil remains deeply worried about the situation in Syria, especially the ongoing military operation in the south-west region of the country and its devastating impact on civilians. Brazil urges all parties to immediately suspend hostilities and engage in efforts leading towards a peaceful solution to the conflict. We also call on parties to take all necessary measures to safeguard civilian lives and infrastructure, especially medical and educational facilities, in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We therefore renew our full support for the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and the intra-Syrian political negotiations in Geneva. We look forward to the establishment of a constitutional committee in line with the agreements reached in Sochi. The support of the international community, especially that of the Security Council, is vital for negotiations to move forward in a concrete and constructive way. Current negotiations benefit from United Nations mediation but must be led by and for the Syrian people and safeguard the unity, the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the country.

Yemen's civil war, which is considered to be the largest current humanitarian crisis, is now in its fourth year and shows no sign of abating. We wish to reiterate that the only viable path for the future of Yemen is a negotiated settlement. In that regard, Brazil expresses its full support for the plans of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths to relaunch political negotiations, and urges all parties to renew efforts to achieve a negotiated solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel to make a further statement.

Ms. Meitzad (Israel): As I take the floor for the last time, I would like to thank my colleagues for the important discussions and the exchange of views in this forum. I would like to respond to some of the comments made earlier here today and make some general observations.

For the past three years, I have listened closely to the representatives of certain States Members, who have repeatedly taken the floor during open debates on the Middle East, to reiterate inaccurate and fabricated data or perpetuate the biased talking points embellished with false accusations. As it is important to maintain open dialogue to better address real pressing issues that present challenges for every one of our countries, such biased and, at times, hateful statements, as usually exemplified by Iran, only erode this institution's founding principles and values. Regrettably, throughout my time here, the open debate on the Middle East has not been used as a platform for any real discussion involving honesty or self-awareness, especially when certain representatives from the Middle East region take the floor.

During the past three years, I have witnessed the musical-chair games in which some delegations claiming to be in favour of a diplomatic solution have refused to be seated next to an Israeli representative at the Security Council table. How can we take this debate seriously when some ban the concept of sitting together at the same table? Throughout my time here, I have always been puzzled by those Security Council members who believe they know best and what is good for the region without discussing it with Israel even once. I wonder what is so intimidating about hearing Israel's views. What do they gain from ignoring Israel's opinion and stance, unless such initiatives were never meant to bring about a real solution? For me, it is common sense that if one seeks to take real initiative, one should first and foremost reach out to the other side him or herself.

Israel believes that any agreement must originate from bilateral and direct negotiations between the two sides. The Security Council cannot act as a substitute for the sides. Therefore, those who wish to truly move the political process forward should call on the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table instead of supporting these profoundly ineffectual open debates. I know that many in this Chamber share the view and understanding that these debates do not strive to reach or promote a real peace agreement, serve the Palestinians real interests or bolster the United Nations reputation. I hope that the day will come when these representatives will speak up and that this debate will cease to be guided by double-standard principles with regard to Israel. Only then will a real constructive debate be able to take place — a debate that will actually promote a solution for both sides.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.